Traducing the Soul: Donne's *Second Anniversarie*

RAMIE TARGOFF

IN HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT, DATED 13 DECEMBER 1630, JOHN Donne plans for his heavenly afterlife. "First," he begins, "I give my good & gracious God an entire sacrifice of body & soul, with my most humble thanks for that assurance which his blessed spirit imprints in me now of the salvation of the one & the resurrection of the other" (Bald 563; spelling modernized). Taken literally, the sentence suggests that the body will experience salvation, the soul resurrection. Not only does Donne confuse the fate of body and soul. He also refuses to elevate the soul over the body as all good Catholics and Protestants would do. And by insisting that his final "sacrifice" to God will consist of both matter and spirit, Donne affirms his belief that God is better served by our two parts than by our souls alone. As he declares in a sermon preached before King James in the early 1620s, "The Kingdome of Heaven hath not all that it must have to a consummate perfection, till it have bodies too." It was for this reason, Donne argues, that God made a "materiall world, a corporeall world, they would have bodies. . . . They are glorified bodies that make up the kingdome of Heaven" (*Sermons* 4: 47).

Throughout his life Donne struggled to make sense of death. Although in his devotional writings he celebrates the ascension of the soul, he never abandons his conviction that the separation of body and soul is an unnatural division of the self. To be sure, he imagines that once the soul has left the body, its experience of heavenly joys will exceed the pleasures of its earthly sojourn. Despite this expectation of future bliss, however, Donne regularly depicts the moment of parting between body and soul as one of shared difficulty. This understanding of death as a difficult process for the soul as well as for the body runs counter to the basic tenets of English Protestantism, and when

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Donne gives voice to this belief, he is particularly careful in its expression. Nowhere in his writings does he provide a forthright explication of the mutual necessity of body and soul. Yet his commitment to this mutuality surfaces quietly in his secular and religious works. In *The Second Anniversarie*, written in 1612 to commemorate Elizabeth Drury, a girl whom he never met, Donne offers his most daring depiction of the longing soul and body feel for each other during their time on this earth. This poem also comes closest to providing an explanation for why the soul feels so strong an attachment to the flesh it is meant to leave behind, an explanation that turns on an unorthodox account of the soul's origins.

The notion that *The Second Anniversarie* is something other than a traditional meditation on the soul's passage to heaven will come as a surprise to most readers. The bracingly unusual representation of the world as corpse in *The First Anniversarie* has long been noted, and its peculiar braiding together of an inquiry into the "new philosophy" on the one hand and a lament for the death of his patron's young daughter on the other hand has made this poem one of the most critically debated works in early modern literature. At the same time that the complexities of *The First Anniversarie* have been thoroughly considered, the radical nature of *The Second Anniversarie* has been startlingly neglected. The title and subtitle of this poem, composed several months after *The First Anniversarie* and published for the second anniversary of Elizabeth Drury's death, announce a straightforward meditative work: "The Progress of the Soule: Wherein by Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistris Elizabeth Drury, the Incommodities of the Soule in This Life and Her Exaltation in the Next, Are Contemplated."[1] These claims both to record the "incommodities" of the earthly and to celebrate the "exaltation" of the heavenly have been accepted by literary critics more or less at face value. Among the most influential readings, Louis Martz declares the poem to retain its focus on a "true Progress" toward God's grace (236–48); and Barbara Lewalski concludes that the poem presents "a sequence of topics concerning the soul's benefit by death, ordered as a logical progression according to an ascending scale" (300). Other critics have largely concurred. P. G. Stanwood describes *The Second Anniversarie* as bearing witness to the "life of grace made possible by God" (231–32); A. C. Partridge argues that Donne represents the death of the body as a "blessing, since it implies a release of the soul" (101); and Terry Sherwood declares that the poet presents a soul "yearning to be filled even further with Grace" (88). Even John Carey, who rarely takes Donne at his word, affirms that *The Second Anniversarie* "vigorously corroborate[s] . . . the traditional opposition of soul and body" (164).

The reasons behind this unusual critical willingness to accept a poem's description of itself are not accidental: they speak to the heart of Donne's method. For the heterodoxies of *The Second Anniversarie* are by no means clearly presented on its surfaces. Instead, the poem dramatizes the tension between the argument that readers expect from the promises of the title and the actual condition of the soul, a soul that remains attached to the flesh against its better theological interests. In representing the struggle of the soul to leave the body behind, Donne simultaneously rehearses and rejects the traditional wisdom of Western metaphysics about human dualism. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul decries his imprisonment in his flesh: "O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (7.24). *The Second Anniversarie* borrows heavily from the Pauline notion of the body as the prison house for the soul, and yet the soul loves the body all the same. This is the disposition of the soul that Donne's poem records, a disposition so unexpected in its violation of normative Christian belief that it has until now escaped our critical eye.[2]

Where do souls come from? Does the body contaminate the soul with original

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sin, or does the soul bring original sin into the body? Is the soul part of the body, or is it created separately? What is the relationship between the body and soul? These are among the questions that Donne attempts to address in *The Second Anniversarie*; they are also the questions that Augustine raised in letter 166 to Jerome, where he explores the nature of the soul's creation. The issue that troubles Augustine is one that has direct bearing on Donne's consideration of the pristine soul of Elizabeth Drury in the Anniversaries: namely, how can we explain the presence of sinfulness in otherwise innocent souls—in Augustine's case, the souls of infants—unless we accept that souls are themselves generated in the body and not made separately by God? "What kind of justice is it," Augustine asks, "that so many thousands of souls should be damned because they departed from their bodies by death in infancy, without the grace of the Christian sacrament, if new souls, created separately by the will of the Creator, are joined to separate bodies at birth, with no previous sin of their own?" (16). If, however, the soul is formed in the body and not created independently by God, Augustine's conundrum disappears. For, in this case, he concludes, we can assume that sin is acquired in the flesh, and hence that God cannot be blamed for implanting original sin in each new soul.

The theory that the soul is formed inside the body is known as traducianism or *ex traduce*. The name derives from the Latin noun *tradux*, which originally meant a vine branch or vine layer trained for propagation and suggested something cultivated domestically rather than divinely made ("Tradux"). *Tradux* later came to be associated with the idea of a family tree. The noun shares the same etymological root with the verb *traducere,* which carried the neutral meaning "to lead across" (*trans-ducere)* as well as the pejorative meaning "to disgrace or betray." In the seventeenth century, the verb *to traduce* still had the connotations of the Latin noun *tradux*: it meant to transmit or pass on to offspring. "Vertue is not traduced in propagation," Bishop Hall admonishes in his 1606 *Meditations,* "nor learning bequeathed by our will to our heires" ("Traduce"). The negative meaning that we retain today was also current at the time—we need only recall Othello's last words:

> And say besides that in Aleppo once
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state
> I took by th'throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him thus. (5.2.361–65)

The *ex traduce* or generative theory of the soul's origins stands in opposition to a theory known as *ex nihilo*—that souls are made not from corporeal generation but "from nothing," or, in the words of Augustine, they are "created separately by the will of the Creator [and] are joined to separate bodies at birth" (16). In nearly all respects, the *ex nihilo* position is more attractive to Augustine—it alone helps to explain the immortality of the soul, for example, since the soul's origins in this case have nothing to do with the mortal body. And yet, although he openly wishes otherwise, Augustine finds himself unable to embrace the *ex nihilo* theory wholeheartedly because of its implications of divine responsibility for human sinfulness. "The opinion that all souls come from the first soul [*ex traduce*] is one I do not wish to discuss," he concludes to Jerome, "unless it should be necessary, and how I wish that the one we are now debating [*ex nihilo*] may be so well upheld by you that the other may not require discussion!" (31).

Despite the urgency of his plea for help—Augustine complains, in fact, that Jerome has sent him students "to learn the very thing I have not yet learned myself" (14)—Augustine never received a satisfying reply.[3] The difficulty of these questions about the origins of the soul continued to plague theologians throughout the centuries, so that by the time Donne attempted to tackle this problem in his

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own letter to a friend sometime in the early 1600s, he could rightly declare a theological muddle. "They which follow the opinion of infusion from God, and of a new creation," Donne writes to Henry Goodyer, "can very hardly defend the doctrine of original sin (the soul is forced to take this infection, and comes not into the body of her own disposition)." Likewise, he explains, "whosoever will adhere to the way of propagation [*ex traduce*] can never excite necessarily and certainly a naturall immortality in the soul if the soul result out of matter." Both the *ex traduce* and the *ex nihilo* positions, then, have serious shortcomings: those who believe in the soul's generation out of matter cannot prove with any certainty the soul's immortality; those who adhere to the idea of divine infusion cannot explain the doctrine of original sin. In both these opinions, Donne demurs, there are "such infirmities as it is time to look for a better" (*Letters* 15).[4]

No further thoughts on this subject appear in the letters that survive, nor does Donne attempt to write a sustained treatise on the soul in the manner of Augustine. Once he assumes his position in the Church of England, his pronouncements on the subject tend to uphold the establishment's preference for the *ex nihilo* account. Hence in a 1624 sermon he refers, for example, to "that soule, which was at first breath'd from God" (*Sermons* 6: 75). Notwithstanding these signs of later conformity, the *ex traduce* position offered clear advantages for his fundamental belief in the mutual dependence between body and soul. In the years preceding his ordination, Donne chose to explore these advantages most thoroughly not in prose but in poetry, a medium that afforded him an expressive and experimental space that his letters and meditations did not seem to allow. In the portrayal of death in *The Second Anniversarie* as comparable to the reluctant parting of two lovers, he denies the soul's desire to be in heaven if such an "elevation" means leaving the body behind. The complexity of this representation of the soul is intensified by the explicit purpose of the poem: to honor the memory of a girl whose soul is assumed to be safely lodged in heaven and whose parents—Donne's patrons—could hardly welcome any suggestions to the contrary. How, then, does Donne reconcile his depiction of the soul's longing for the body with the commemoration of Elizabeth Drury? And what form of comfort could such a poem ultimately offer?

The First Anniversarie laments the state of the world once the soul of Elizabeth Drury has departed. The loss of Elizabeth is not an isolated event—it is, as the poem's title declares, the "occasion" for nothing less than the death of the world. In *The Second Anniversarie* Donne shifts his focus from the earthly to the heavenly, from the body to the soul. Here, we imagine, consolation will finally be delivered. By addressing the soul's joyful "progress" to heaven and not the pitiful state of the world left behind, this poem promises a hopeful vision of Elizabeth's posthumous life. Indeed, in both its sweeping indictment of mortal existence and its affirmation of heavenly pleasures unattainable on earth, *The Second Anniversarie* seems at first glance to be a series of *contemptus mundi* meditations designed to prepare the soul for heaven (see Martz). But although such readings are certainly available—and in isolated passages convincing—they overlook the profound idiosyncrasy of Donne's poem. For those familiar with the meditative traditions that Donne inherited, what is altogether startling about *The Second Anniversarie* is its representation of the great difficulty of releasing the soul from its earthly attachments. Given the wretched condition of the world so vigorously evoked in *The First Anniversarie*, we have no reason to expect such reluctance from the soul. Despite the promises of its title, however, *The Second Anniversarie*, or "The Progresse of the Soule," does not ultimately celebrate the soul's ascension. Instead,

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the poem's overwhelming achievement lies in its portrayal of the unnaturalness in separating the two parts of the self.

Donne's resistance to the prospect of separating body from soul pervades both his secular and devotional writings. In "The Extasie" (*Poems* 1: 51–53), he stages the departure of the lovers' souls from their bodies only to ask, with the force of a startling Petrarchan *volta*:

> But O alas, so long, so farre
> Our bodies why doe wee forbeare?
> They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee
> are
> The intelligences, they the spheare.
> (lines 49–52)

This essay is not the occasion for a full reading of these lines, and Pierre Legouis, René Graziani, and Arthur Marotti, among others, have written powerfully about them. I quote this passage only as a reminder that although Donne may privilege the soul as superior to the body, the force of the poem is to insist on the necessity of both soul and body in bringing the two lovers together. If the lovers' purely bodily union fails to produce anything but unpleasantly "cimented" handholding, so their souls' meeting outside the bodies ultimately falls short of the consummation that they most desire. However much Donne pretends at the end of the poem to qualify the bodily reunion as a vulgar concession to "weake men," "The Extasie" strongly conveys the poet's commitment to a love that entails both body and soul. "To'our bodies turne wee then," he famously concludes, "that so / Weake men on love reveal'd may looke / Loves mysteries in soules doe grow / But yet the body is his booke" (69–72).

Some decades later, as dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Donne declares with extraordinary directness how unnatural it is to separate body from soul. In a 1623 Easter-day sermon, he asks, "May not man be happy enough in heaven, though his body never come thither?" Nay, he responds, "to constitute a man, there must be a body, as well as a soule. . . . Naturally the soule and body are united, [and] when they are separated by Death, it is contrary to nature, which nature still affects this union; and consequently the soule is the lesse perfect, for this separation." "The soul is the lesse perfect for this separation": whatever happiness the soul might anticipate in heaven, it will not be perfected until it is reunited with the body. "All that the soule does," Donne concludes, "it does in, and with, and by the body" (*Sermons* 4: 357–58).

In texts ranging from his early prose work, *Paradoxes*, where he declares, "I say again, that the *body* makes the *minde*" (33), through his *Devotions* and late sermons, Donne reveals again and again his belief that body and soul are mutually dependent and constitutive.[5] I have chosen to focus on *The Second Anniversarie* because it represents his most sustained, and most imaginative, exploration of the disposition of his soul and its feelings toward the body at the moment of death. Much to the surprise of first-time readers, it is not the ascent of Elizabeth Drury's soul that Donne charts in this poem but the hypothetical "progress" of his own. The decision to focus on himself may derive from his desire to produce an extensive and probing exploration of a soul—the spiritual equivalent of the earthly "anatomie" in *The First Anniversarie*—a task that would be difficult to perform on even an intimate friend, let alone on someone he never met. The decision may also be explained in terms of the highly unconventional treatment of the soul that he provides, one that surely would not have pleased his patron, Robert Drury, should it have been applied to the soul of Drury's beloved daughter. For in striking contrast to a traditional Christian narrative that celebrates the soul's liberation at the moment of death, *The Second Anniversarie* describes an entirely unhappy and begrudging parting between soul and body.

Donne begins *The Second Anniversarie* by expressing a kind of sympathy for the

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body when it loses the soul. From the beginning, we observe a significant difference in tone from *The First Anniversarie*, where he describes with clinical detachment the death of the body once the soul has departed:

> But though it be too late to succour thee,
> Sicke world, yea dead, yea putrified, since shee
> Thy'ntrinsique Balme, and thy preservative,
> Can never be renew'd, thou never live,
> I (since no man can make thee live) will trie,
> What we may gaine by thy Anatomy.
> (lines 55–60)

Far from pitying the suffering of the corpse, Donne assumes in these lines the role of a cool, dispassionate anatomist.

In *The Second Anniversarie*, by contrast, the poet begins with a nuanced account of the strange, lingering impression of the body's vitality in the moments following death:

> But as a ship which hath strooke saile, doth runne,
> By force of that force which before, it wonne,
> Or as sometimes in a beheaded man,
> Though at those two Red seas, which freely ran,
> One from the Trunke, another from the Head,
> His soule be saild, to her eternall bed,
> His eies will twinckle, and his tongue will roll,
> As though he beckned, and cal'd backe his Soul.
> He graspes his hands, and he puls up his feet,
> And seemes to reach, and to step forth to meet
> His soule. . . . (7–17)

Donne's early-twentieth-century editor Herbert J. C. Grierson (Donne, *Poems* 2: 273) traces the simile of the beheaded man to a passage in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in which the Roman poet describes the slaying of a soldier: "Even the head shorn off from the hot and living trunk retains on the ground the look of life and its open eyes, until it has rendered up all that is left of the spirit" (217; 3.654–56).

If Grierson is right that Donne relied on this description in composing his own—and, as David A. Hedrich Hirsch has shown, there is ample evidence in Donne's work that he knew Lucretius's poem—it becomes all the more striking that Donne emphasizes the corpse's gestures of longing. Lucretius's corpse is without attachment or affect: the process of giving up the soul is purely reflexive. In Donne's hands, by contrast, the grotesque and macabre figure of the corpse nonetheless gives the impression of bidding a reluctant farewell to its spirit: it is "as though he beckoned, and called back his soul." This impression is compounded by the image that follows of a last, desperate attempt, in which he "seemes to reach, and to step forth" into a final encounter with the soul so recently lost. The involuntary nature of these motions—evocatively likened to the cracking of ice after a thaw, or the sounds produced by a lute when its strings begin to break—merely intensifies the force of the body's desire.[6]

This early passage in the poem establishes the cravings of the body to stay connected to the soul. For the rest of the poem, Donne shifts his attention to the more surprising depiction of the soul's comparable cravings to remain with the body. The soul's attachment to the body is the real, if undeclared, subject of *The Second Anniversarie*; that attachment also represents one of Donne's least recognized but most important contributions to early modern poetry. For Donne shows us a soul that we rarely, if ever, encounter in devotional literature—a soul that clings desperately to the body despite repeated assurances of its freedom. Compare, for example, the soul of Andrew Marvell's "Dialogue between the Soul and Body," which begins with the plaintive cry:

> O, who shall, from this dungeon, raise
> A soul inslaved so many ways?
> With bolts of bones, that fettered stands
> In feet; and manacled in hands.
> Here blinded with an eye; and there
> Deaf with the drumming of an ear.
> A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains
> Of nerves, and arteries, and veins.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Tortured, besides each other part,
In a vain head, and double heart.
(lines 1–10)

"Enslaved," "fettered," "manacled," "blinded," "hung up," "tortured": this is the language Donne might use to characterize what he dismissively refers to in *The First Anniversarie* as a mere "in-mate soule," one who lodges only temporarily in the body and is desperate to escape (line 6). If Marvell's soul begs in the traditional idiom of Christian metaphysics to be freed from the "dungeon" of the flesh, Donne's soul reveals a great unwillingness to leave its mortal home.

The idea of the reluctant soul is introduced early in *The Second Anniversarie*, where Donne instructs his soul to thirst for the day when human hymns shall be overwhelmed by God's own:

These Hymns thy issue, may encrease so long,
As till Gods great Venite change the song.
Thirst for that time, O my insatiate soule,
And serve thy thirst, with Gods safe-sealing Bowle.
Bee thirsty still, and drinke still till thou goe;
'Tis th'onely Health, to be Hydropique so.
Forget this rotten world. . . . (43–49)

What does it mean that Donne needs to command his soul to thirst? At first glance, it might seem that his soul lacks thirst altogether and hence needs its desires to be stimulated. On further reflection, however, it becomes clear that the possession of thirst per se is not the problem. It is the object of the soul's thirst that needs to be corrected. For the problem is not that Donne has a lackluster soul: his soul is thirsty, even "insatiate," but its thirst does not naturally incline toward the drink placed before it. Donne has chosen, in other words, to represent a soul that does not want "God's safe-sealing Bowle," a soul that leans, as it were, in the wrong direction.

The challenge that arises here, and that occupies most of the poem, is to redirect the soul's desire: Donne wants to orient the soul's "hydropique" drive toward heavenly and not earthly ends. To argue—as nearly all commentators on these lines have done—that the soul already yearns for this spiritual drink and that Donne describes, in the words of one critic, only further "fulfillment of the soul's thirst in joy" (Sherwood 88) is to miss what I take to be not only the central project of the poem but a central preoccupation throughout Donne's writings: to console the soul as well as the body in the face of their separation. The soul of *The Second Anniversarie* is not naturally filled with the desire for its union with God. It is a soul stuck in attachments that it has been taught by Christian doctrine to relinquish, a soul that bemoans rather than celebrates its imminent freedom from earthly matter.

Donne's efforts to convince the soul to leave the earth begin with arguments that he rehearsed in *The First Anniversarie* about the world's corruption. In that poem, he characterized the world's "general disease" not to lie "in any humour, or one certaine part / But, as thou sawest it rotten at the hart" (240–42). In *The Second Anniversarie*, he is less interested in the status of the world as corpse than in the soul's parasitic relation to this carcass. "The world is but a Carkas," he declaims:

thou art fed
By it, but as a worme, that carcas bred;
And why shouldst thou, poore worme, consider more,
When this world will grow better then before,
Then those thy fellow-wormes doe thinke upone
That carkasses last resurrectione. (55–60)

The shock of these lines lies in their unprecedented address of the soul as "poore worme." No longer the source of the body's animation, the soul becomes no better than a maggot feeding on death. By comparing the soul to the worm, Donne suggests that the soul's lingering presence on earth threatens to confuse the categories of material and spiritual beings. This

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confusion is intensified by the caesura in line 55—"the world is but a Carkas, thou art fed"—which creates an uncomfortable closeness between "Carkas" and "thou" (the soul). Some lines later, Donne returns to Elizabeth's death as further proof of the world's worthlessness:

> Shee, shee is gone; shee is gone; when thou knowest this,
> What fragmentary rubbidge this world is
> Thou knowest, and that it is not worth a thought;
> He honors it too much that thinks it nought. (81–84)

These arguments do nothing, however, either to propel the soul forward or to sever its attachment to a world that it has been instructed to despise. If Donne means to represent the "incommodities of the soule in this life," why does he depict his soul as so reluctant to depart?

As I have already suggested, the most compelling answer to this question lies in Donne's account of the soul's origins. In *The Second Anniversarie*, Donne experiments with the idea that the soul is not a strictly divine creation. Instead, he imagines that the soul is made in the body. We might gauge the unusualness of his depiction of the soul's relation to the body by comparing it with John Davies's 1599 poem *Nosce Teipsum,* a meditation on the immortality of the soul that propounds a conventional *ex nihilo* argument:

> But as Gods handmayde, Nature doth create
> Bodies in time distinct, and order due,
> So God gives soules the like successive date,
> Which him selfe makes in bodies formed new:
> Which him selfe makes of no materiall thing
> . . . . . .
> For though from bodies [Nature] can bodies bring,
> Yet could she never soules from soules traduce,
> As fire from fire, or light from light doth spring. (613–24)

For Davies, souls are created not from any "materiall thing": they are made from "substance of the heaven" (620). Nature may create bodies, that is, but it cannot create souls. To traduce the soul—to generate spiritual matter from bodily procreation—is also to traduce the soul in the pejorative sense. It is to suggest an ungodly origin for the immortal part of the self.

If Davies's poem represents, in the words of its twentieth-century editor, "the average Christian philosophy at the end of the Renaissance" (Davies 20), Donne's poem surely does not. This is not to claim that traducianism was unique to Donne. In the English Protestant tradition, he could look to the work of the Elizabethan divine John Woolton, for example, who argued in his 1576 *Treatise of the Immortalitie of the Soule* that "mans Soule commeth *ex traduce,* and hath his origin together with the body." "For as the soule is not before the body," Woolton concludes, "so in the beginning of manne the body is not before the soule. They have both one beginning" (19b, 25b-26). Later in the seventeenth century, Thomas Browne, in *Religio Medici*, and John Milton, in *Christian Doctrine*, would espouse this position. Browne remarks that he "cannot but wonder at the multitude of heads that do deny traduction" and, leaning on rather odd evidence, explains his own certainty as a result of observing those "equivocal and monstrous productions in the copulation of man with beast." "For if the soul be not transmitted and transfused in the seed of the parents," he asks, "why are not these productions merely beasts, but have also a tincture and impression of reason?" (44–45). Milton frames the problem in more conventional, Augustinian terms, arguing that an *ex nihilo* account of the soul suggests unequivocally that God infuses the soul with original sin. "My answer," he declares,

> is that to create pure souls which lack original righteousness, and then to put them into contaminated and vicious bodies, to surrender them to the body as to an enemy, imprisoned, innocent and unarmed . . . to do all this would argue injustice just as much as to have created them impure would argue impurity. (6: 321)

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Unique to *The Second Anniversarie* is not its advocacy of an *ex traduce* account per se but its deployment of this belief as a means to explain the soul's attachment to the body. To convey the absurdity of the soul's attachment to the body, Donne paradoxically affirms the soul's tainted, bodily origins. Hence he instructs the soul to meditate on its creation in the flesh: "Think further on thy selfe, my soule," he commands, "and thinke / How thou at first was made but in a sinke" (157–58). Nothing could be further, of course, from a pristine creation in heaven than this image of the stomach or womb as a "sinke"—a term used in the period only to describe sewers, cesspools, and other receptacles for waste ("Sink"). The subsequent lines only intensify the impression of the dirty conditions of the soul's birth:

> Think but how poore thou wast, how
> obnoxious,
> Whom a small lump of flesh could poison thus.
> This curded milke, this poore unlittered
> whelpe
> My body, could, beyond escape or helpe,
> Infect thee with original sinne, and thou
> Couldst neither then refuse, nor leave it now.
> (163–68)

In chastising the soul for its excessive vulnerability or "obnoxiousness"—here suggesting frailty or liability to illness—to the hardly threatening "curded milke" or "lump of flesh" that is the human body, Donne implies that a stronger soul could certainly have withstood the infection of original sin. Despite this implication, he made clear in *The First Anniversarie* that no one—not even the purest of creatures, Elizabeth Drury—can resist contamination.

It is worth pausing to consider Donne's treatment of original sin in this earlier poem, since it has important consequences for his depiction of the soul in *The Second Anniversarie*. In *The First Anniversarie*, Donne describes Elizabeth as the world's "[i]ntrinsique Balme, and thy preservative" (57), as if she alone could protect the world from the corruption that ensues on her death. The metaphor of the "Balme" can be traced to the sixteenth-century German physician Paracelsus, who maintained that every living creature contained its own balsam that protected the body from decay.[7] At the same time that Elizabeth Drury protected the earth as a balm protects the body, Donne also suggests in *The First Anniversarie* that the world was responsible for her death.[8] The reason for this lies in the pervasiveness of earthly corruption, a corruption that seems to spread unsparingly to the protective balm itself. "Her death hath taught us dearely," Donne remarks to the corpse of the world on his dissection table, "that thou art / Corrupt and mortal in thy purest part" (61–62). It is not altogether clear what he means by the earth's "purest part"—presumably he does not refer to Elizabeth's soul, which might be corrupted by original sin but which he would not characterize as mortal. More likely, he refers to the combination of Elizabeth's body and soul, which together came closest to but could not finally possess the level of purity required to withstand the corroding force of decay.

Donne's interest in determining the purity of the earth's "purest part" corresponds to one of the crucial tasks of *The First Anniversarie*: to identify any form of corporeality that might be invulnerable to corruption. In a very strange passage that follows shortly on the lines describing the penetrating power of the disease's corruption, Donne conjures up the world that remains after Elizabeth's death, a world filled with "new creatures" whose bodies are composed of Elizabeth's virtue:

> to be thus Elemented, arme[s]
> These creatures, from home-borne
> intrinsique harme,
> (For all assum'd unto this Dignitee,
> So many weedlesse Paradises bee,
> Which of themselves produce no
> venomous sinne,
> Except some forraine Serpent bring it in.
> (79–84)

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The "home-borne intrinsique harme" is original sin, the contaminating principle wrought by "some forraine Serpent" that affects all human beings alike. To be immune to the corrosion of earthly decay, one must also be exempt from original sin. There is no possibility of maintaining material integrity while suffering from spiritual corruption.

However close Elizabeth came to perfection, her death ultimately reflects her inclusion among the race of human beings, whose sinfulness is innate and not foreign. As Donne remarked in his "Elegie on the Lady Marckham" (*Poems* 1: 279–81): "She sinn'd, but just enough to let us see / That God's word must be true, All, sinners be" (lines 43–44). Although he is not nearly so frank about the inevitable sinfulness of Elizabeth's soul, the implication is clear: Elizabeth could not save the world because the world—both physically and spiritually—had contaminated her.

In *The Second Anniversarie* Donne extends his discussion of original sin to the question of the origins of the soul. Just as Augustine could not reconcile the tension between an *ex nihilo* explanation and the presence of original sin in each soul, so Donne struggles with the idea that something forged by God outside the body could be susceptible to corporeal infection. Some twelve years later, in *Devotions,* he writes that it is "hard to charge the *soule* with the guiltiness of *originall* sinne, if the *soule* were infused into a *body*, in which it must necessarily grow *foule* and contract *originall sinne,* whether it *will* or *no*" (114–15). The clarity of this exposition in *Devotions* is not transferable to *The Second Anniversarie*, and the pleasure of the poem lies to no small degree in its complex depiction of a soul that is not making a theologically sound decision. However, if we return now to the question posed earlier—Why does Donne simultaneously declare the soul's earthly life to be full of "incommodities" and represent its attachment to the body as so deep?—we can provisionally conclude that the complicity between body and soul emerges out of the soul's status as a bodily creation.

After stressing the foul conditions of the soul's birth, Donne returns to the task of imagining the soul's liberation from the body in death. "This to thy soule allow," he instructs,

> Thinke thy sheel broke, thinke thy Soule
> hatch'd but now.
> And thinke this slow-pac'd soule, which late
> did cleave,
> To'a body, and went but by the bodies leave,
> Twenty, perchance, or thirty mile a day,
> Dispatches in a minute all the way
> Twixt Heaven, and Earth. . . . (183–89)

In order to advance the soul's contemplation of this "long-short Progresse" to heaven (219), Donne reintroduces Elizabeth Drury into the poem after a nearly eighty-line absence and bids his soul to remember her example in a passage praised by readers over the centuries:[9]

> [R]emember then, that shee
> Shee, whose faire body no such prison was
> But that a soule might well be pleas'd to passe
> An Age in her; shee whose rich beauty lent
> Mintage to other beauties, for they went
> But for so much, as they were like to her
> . . . . . .
> Shee, of whose soule, if we may say, t'was Gold,
> Her body was th'Electrum, and did hold
> Many degrees of that; we understood
> Her by her sight, her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinckly
> wrought,
> That one might almost say, her bodie
> thought. . . . (220–25, 241–46)

The elaborate accumulation of dependent clauses describing the unique nature of Elizabeth's flesh culminates in perhaps the finest compliment any metaphysician could give to the body: "one might almost say, her bodie thought." As Carey points out, this "integration of body and mind" contradicts the received truths of Western Christianity: "Donne collapses," he observes, "in an instant, this

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age-old dualism" (164–65). Of course, the "almost" in "one might almost say" gently retreats from affirming the radical possibility that the body itself does the thinking and hence that there is really no distinction between corporeal and mental faculties. But the suggestion is certainly there, and it corresponds to Donne's larger interest in blurring the line between material and spiritual, body and soul.

This reluctance of Donne's to recognize or reify the distinctions between the two parts of the self first surfaced in *The First Anniversarie*, where Donne describes a world so plagued by the "general sicknesse" that not even its "subtilst immaterial parts" are immune: "For the worlds subtilst immaterial parts / Feele this consuming wound, and ages darts" (247–48). What he means by the "subtilst immaterial parts" is not immediately clear. In the seventeenth century, *subtle* was regularly used to describe a substance of thin consistency. As Donne knew from Aristotle and Aquinas, among others, substances are either material or immaterial, but while there are varying degrees of materiality, there are not comparable categories for immateriality. The parts can be immaterial or subtly material, but they cannot be subtle and immaterial at the same time.

Donne was not a metaphysician by trade, however, and what was impossible for Aristotle or Aquinas was imaginatively suggestive for the poet. We might consider, for example, his discussion in "Aire and Angels" (*Poems* 1: 22) of Love's necessary embodiment, where "subtle" clearly connotes the condition of being less material:

> But since my soule, whose child love is,
> Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
> More subtile then the parent is,
> Love must not be, but take a body too. (7–10)

In *The First Anniversarie*, as in "Aire and Angels," Donne reveals his interest in testing the boundary between materiality and immateriality, in locating those substances that belonged precisely on the border between the two states of being. When he mentions the "worlds subtilst immaterial parts," he does so as a gesture of approximating but never reaching the point where matter, however fine or pure, becomes spirit. In *The Second Anniversarie*, his compliment to Elizabeth—"one might almost say, her bodie thought"—attempts to define what it would mean for a body to be indistinguishable from a mind.

Donne began the long compliment in *The Second Anniversarie* with the instruction to remember: "remember then, that shee / Shee, whose faire body no such prison was." Following the nearly thirty-line deferral of the verb's main object, during which he describes in extravagant terms how extraordinary Elizabeth's body was, we might expect the climax to be something like, "Shee, ev'n shee, chose to shed her mortal flesh." But the conclusion we anticipate—that unlike Donne's soul, which cannot part from the inferior home of his flesh, Elizabeth's soul willingly left the most intelligent, alluring, and pure of bodies—is denied us. Instead, Donne records her soul's departure as neither voluntary nor resistant but simply as fact. The passage ends with a declaration of loss more appropriate to the funeral elegy he wrote for Elizabeth before composing the Anniversaries than to a poem meant to celebrate the ascension of her soul: "Shee, shee, thus richly, and largely hous'd, is gone" (247).

Why is this conclusion so surprising? It is surprising because there is no assertion whatsoever of the soul's eagerness in leaving the body behind, because the challenge that the poem has posed for itself—to persuade the soul to relinquish its mortal trappings—is left entirely unresolved. Granted, Donne does allow that once it has severed itself from the body and found its way to heaven, Elizabeth's soul chastises those who remain on this earth. In the subsequent lines he describes her soul as "chid[ing] us slow-pac'd snails, who crawle upon / Our prisons prison earth, nor thinke us well / Longer, then whil'st we beare our

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

brittle shell" (248–50). But given both the paucity of evidence provided for the superior life after death and the devastating poetic effect of concluding the long sentence with the iambic foot "is gone"—and not, for example, with something suggestively positive like "arose"—it would be difficult not to feel that the loss of "[s]hee, shee, thus richly, and largely hous'd" exceeds any joy over her ascension. There is no gratitude for the soul's liberation. Instead, there is an overwhelming sense of the tragedy in the soul's loss of the body.

The tragedy for the soul of separating from the body does not conform to any standard account of death in English Protestantism, whose official liturgy celebrates with no ambivalence the ascent of the soul. In the "Burial of the Dead" service in the Book of Common Prayer, the priest affirms that the "souls of them that be elected, after they be delivered from the burden of the flesh, be in joy and felicity," and this reassurance was understood to be sufficiently strong to vanquish any lingering attachments to the earth (312). What, then, is wrong with Donne's soul in *The Second Anniversarie*?

One explanation for the soul's excessive attachment to the flesh lies, as we have seen, in its corporeal origins. A second, related explanation turns on the soul's inadequate self-knowledge. Donne suggests, in fact, that the inability to understand itself is a fundamental feature of the soul and that this feature heightens its unwillingness to leave the body behind. "Thou know'st thyself so little," he exclaims,

> as thou know'st not
> How thou didst die, nor how thou wast begot.
> Thou neither know'st, how thou at first camest in,
> Nor how thou took'st the poyson of mans sin.
> Nor dost thou, (though thou knowst, that thou art so)
> By what way thou art made immortall, know. (255–60)

Earlier in the poem Donne expounded to the soul its *ex traduce* origins—that the soul "camest in" through generation and hence took original sin in the flesh. In these lines, he emphasizes that the soul's ignorance not only about its birth and contamination but also about its immortality is responsible for its misguided attraction to the body. If only, he wryly suggests, the soul could intuitively understand what philosophers have been debating for thousands of years, it would no doubt be able to make a sound decision and abandon its earthly home.

There are strong echoes here of Montaigne's skeptical masterpiece, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, an essay that Donne almost certainly knew and that raises nearly identical questions about the soul's capacity for knowledge (see Klause). "Now it is likely that if the soul knew anything," Montaigne writes,

> It would first of all know itself; and if it knew anything outside of itself, that would be its body and shell before anything else. If we see even to this day the gods of medicine disputing about our anatomy, "Vulcan against, Apollo for Troy stood" (Ovid), when do we expect them to agree? . . . If man does not know himself, how does he know his functions and powers? (421)

Montaigne remains focused in this essay on the variability and instability of earthly knowledge. Donne, by contrast, denounces human knowledge in order to imagine an elevated position from which our self-understanding would be improved. Hence he moves from attacking the soul's ignorance—"In this low forme, poore soule what wilt thou doe? / When wilt thou shake of this Pedantery / Of being taught by sense, and Fantasy?" (290–92)—to offering the promise of enlightenment:

> Thou look'st through spectacles; small things seeme great
> Below; But up unto the watch-towre get
> And see all things despoyld of fallacies.
> Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies,
> Nor heare through Laberinths of eares, nor learne

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1493 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> By circuit, or collections to discerne.
> In Heaven thou straight know'st all. . . .
> (293–99)

Once the soul arrives in heaven, Donne affirms, learning will no longer be a somatic experience: it will not involve the bodily instruments of eyes or ears, which are likened to the media of "lattices" and "laberinths." Although *labyrinth* was already used at the time to describe part of the inner ear and *lattice* conjures up the retina of the eye, he puns on the obfuscating rather than enabling implications of both terms: seeing and hearing are at once facilitated and hindered by our anatomical structure. In heaven, the poet declares, apprehension becomes unmediated—it is something we know "straight," without the use of our senses.

Even the promise of unmediated knowledge about body and soul seems inadequate, however, as a means to sever the soul's attachment to the flesh. Once again, it is striking that Donne does not end his long description of heavenly knowledge by affirming the soul's newfound readiness to shed its mortal home. Instead, the soul persists in its inclination downward. As if he feels his soul turning slowly but decisively away from the glorious offerings of the heavens, he implores it to stay put: "Returne not, my soule, from this extasee / And meditation of what thou shalt be / To earthly thoughts" (321–23). Donne's fascination with ecstasy—literally, a standing beside or outside of oneself—pervades his writings. Yet, as we witness in "The Extasie," the ecstatic departure of the soul is ultimately valued for enhancing, not diminishing, the sensation of embodiment. Despite the warning to "returne not," the description of this experience as an "extasee" has as a precondition the resumption of the flesh.

If we compare these intimations in *The Second Anniversarie* of either indifference or outright resistance to the proffered visions of heavenly bliss with, for example, Spenser's account of Red Cross Knight at a similar moment in *The Faerie Queene*, the peculiarity of Donne's depiction becomes even more palpable. Having glimpsed the new Jerusalem from Mount Contemplation, Red Cross Knight expresses his reluctance to return to his earthly life: "'O let me not,' quoth he, 'then turne againe / Backe to the world, whose joyes so fruitlesse are / But let me here for aye in peace remaine'" (1.10.63.559–61). In *The Second Anniversarie*, by contrast, Donne's soul finds the visions or arguments presented insufficiently compelling to lure it up to heaven. "Up, up, my drowsie soule," Donne beseeches yet again, "where thy new eare / Shall in the Angels songs no discord heare" (339–40).

After more than three hundred lines of witnessing the refusal of Donne's soul to depart from its corrupted mortal home, we are now in a position to answer the central question, Why is a poem entitled "The Progress of the Soule" so incapable of leaving the body behind? The simplest conclusion is that the poem somehow slipped from Donne's control, that he meant but somehow failed to represent a willing soul's ascent to heaven. But the careful representations of the soul's inability to sustain its meditation on heavenly prospects; the deliberate refusal to portray the soul's eagerness to depart at the time of death; the syntactically delayed sentences that do not deliver the conclusions we expect—each of these features of the poem suggests simultaneously a poet very much in control of his material and one whose ostensible purpose masks what he actually wants to represent.

Despite the poem's saturation in *contemptus mundi* and *vanitas* traditions, despite its piling of negative attributes on everything earthly, Donne chooses not to represent the soul as joyfully anticipating its liberation from the flesh. This is the central paradox of *The Second Anniversarie*, a paradox that readers have long ignored perhaps because it violates traditional notions of the relationship between soul and body in English Protestantism, or perhaps because, more simply,

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it seems to negate the success of the poem. Yet the act of representing the difficulty of divorcing soul from body cannot be adduced as evidence of *The Second Anniversarie*'s failure. On the contrary, it is an achievement unparalleled in English poetry. It is also Donne's most significant challenge to a philosophical and theological dualism that privileges the spiritual over the material self. And this challenge to dualism is finally a possible source of comfort to the grieving Drurys.

Toward the end of the poem, Donne ventures a final argument for the benefits of heaven over earth. Even the "accidentall" joys of heaven, he insists, surpass our "essentiall" earthly pleasures, and he observes "how poore and lame, must then our casuall [joys] bee" (473). He does not, however, describe in any detail the nature of these heavenly joys. Instead, he simply affirms that what differentiates heavenly joys from earthly joys is their duration:

> Onely in Heaven joies strength is never spent,
> And accidental things are permanent.
> Joy of a soules arrivall never decaies
> For that soule every ioyes, and ever staies.
> (487–90)

This heavenly quality of permanence not only applies to the soul, moreover, but also speaks to Donne's fantasy about the body. Hence he describes the joy that "approaches in the resurrection / When earthly bodies more celestiall / Shalbe, then Angels were, for they could fall" (492–94).

The perfection of the flesh depends on its reunion with the soul, and at the end of *The Second Anniversarie* Donne turns to the prospect of this reunion. The last lines of the poem affirm his role as *vates*: "Thou art the Proclamation, and I ame / The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came" (526–27). This is the prophecy he wants to proclaim, the day described in 1 Corinthians, when "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible" (15.52). For Donne to imagine himself as God's trumpet—the embodied instrument of a heavenly spirit—is his most exalted vision of what it means to be a poet.[10]

The climactic vision of a heavenly reunion between body and soul at the end of *The Second Anniversarie* is not only the moment for Donne's affirmation of himself as a poet. It is also where the Drurys might find an unexpected but compelling form of consolation. As someone who had experienced the death of children, Donne may have felt a certain inadequacy in assuring the Drurys that the soul of their beloved daughter was in heaven while her mortal remains, however elaborate the tombstone, lay buried in the cold ground. He may have imagined, in other words, that although Protestant theology and liturgy told the Drurys to celebrate the ascension of the soul, real comfort lay elsewhere. It lay in the prospect of future continuity—a day when body and soul were forever united—and not in the confirmation of rupture. This prospect also corresponds to his hopeful anticipations for his own posthumous existence, an existence ideally characterized not by severing but by intensifying the bonds between body and soul, by his becoming—and remaining—ever more himself.

One of Donne's favorite verses from Scripture was Job 19.26: "And though, after my skin, wormes destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." In a sermon delivered on this verse in the early 1620s, he triumphantly concludes:

> *Ego*, I, I the same body, and the same soul, shall be recompact again, and be identically, numerically, individually the same man. The same integrity of body, and soul, and the same integrity in the Organs of my body, and in the faculties of my soul too; I shall be all there, my body, and my soul, and all my body, and all my soul. (*Sermons* 3: 109–10)

What Donne chooses to celebrate here and elsewhere is not the solitary ascension of the soul. As *The Second Anniversarie* overwhelmingly confirms, only the meeting of the immortal

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soul and the invulnerable body satisfies his deepest aspiration for the afterlife.

Notes

I would like to thank Jeffrey Knapp, Arthur Marotti, Rebecca Olson, Mary Papazian, Annabel Patterson, John Plotz, Leah Price, Gordon Teskey, and Stephen Greenblatt for their suggestions for revising this essay. I am also grateful to Andreas Hoefele at the University of Munich, Gary Taylor at Florida State University, and Suzanne Wofford at the University of Wisconsin for giving me opportunities to present this work. Finally, I would like to thank the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, where I researched and wrote this essay with the support of a year-long fellowship.

1. See "Textual Introduction" to *The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies* (38–41). All my references to the Anniversaries and "A Funerall Elegie" are from this edition.

2. Harold Love addresses the relation between spirit and matter as central to the concerns of *The First Anniversarie*, but he does not connect this relation to Donne's larger interests in dualism.

3. See Jerome's reply, in which he declares that he could not reply, "not because I found anything blameworthy . . . but because in the words of the blessed apostle, 'Each person abounds in his own ideas'" (122).

4. In the 1651 edition (reprinted in 1910), this letter is assigned to Thomas Lucy, but there is strong reason to believe it was written to Goodyer. According to Roger E. Bennett, it is "one of several of Donne's efforts to encourage Goodere to be constant in his religion" (75n40).

5. For the *Devotions*, see ch. 5 of my forthcoming book.

6. See Low for a provocative reading of the final line of this passage: "For there is motion in corruption."

7. For Donne's relation to Paracelsus, see Murray.

8. I am indebted here to Love's article.

9. As early as 1829, Anna Jameson remarked that these lines "have been quoted *ad infinitum*" (Donne, *Anniversaries* 498).

10. See Frontain for a rich and illuminating history of the trumpet image and its relation to Donne's role as prophet.

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