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Donne and Virginia: The Ideology of Conquest

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When John Donne rose to preach to the members of the Virginia Company on November 13, 1622, after news had reached London of the massacre of English settlers by the native inhabitants in Virginia, he warned company leaders to resist the temptation to exterminate the aboriginal people and reminded them that their primary goal was to bring the light of Christ to those same natives.[1] His voice thus countered demands for a violent retaliation, such as those suggested by company secretary Edward Waterhouse, who advised, "the way of conquering them is much more easie then of ciuilizing them by faire meanes. . . ."[2] Donne also implicitly rejected claims by his friend Christopher Brooke that the natives were "Errors of Nature, of inhumane Birth," that they were "Father'd by Sathan, and the sonnes of hell."[3] In contrast, Donne counselled the company members to return to their earlier, more admirable practices: "Enamore them with your *Iustice*, and, (as farre as may consist with your security) your *Civilitie;* but inflame them with your *godlinesse,* and your *Religion.*"[4] Donne's stand against authorized terrorism is clear. At the same time, Walter Benjamin's frequently quoted statement provides the motivation for further appraisal: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[5] Central works of the western canon such as *The Tempest* and *Paradise Lost* have been interrogated so as to disclose their colonialist meanings. Such works often officially proclaim the humane values of forgiveness and divine providence while also inscribing and excusing a brutal appropriation and expropriation of the New World within their texts.[6] As Peter Hulme comments, "'Civility'—European civility—can only guarantee the

stability of its own foundations by denying the substantiality of other worlds, other words, other narratives."[7] To what extent was Donne an unwitting accomplice in framing the narrative that ultimately contributed to the destruction and collapse of native society in Virginia? For, while Donne may be seen as trying to mitigate the worst effects of English colonialism, he nevertheless helped to construct an intellectual and imaginative discourse that led to extermination. In the process, Donne may well have helped to fulfill one of Machiavelli's strategies, as demonstrated in Machiavelli's praise of Numa Pompilius, who, "finding a very savage people, and wishing to reduce them to civil obedience by the arts of peace, had recourse to religion as the most necessary and assured support of any civil society."[8]

The narrative of European "civility" needs to be read back into the culture not only well before actual experiences of contact took place, but also in texts other than those of colonization. Perhaps one of the most surprising features of the first literature surrounding the encounter of European and aboriginal cultures is the lack of surprise on the part of the Europeans at anything that they met in the new world. As Hulme suggested above, the mental framework was already in place to assimilate the new to established modes of thought and perception. Stephen Greenblatt summarizes the situation: "We can demonstrate that, in the face of the unknown, Europeans used their conventional intellectual and organizational structures, fashioned over centuries of mediated contact with other cultures, and that these structures greatly impeded a clear grasp of the radical otherness of the American lands and peoples."[9] As a character in one of Tom Stoppard's plays cynically puts it, "Audiences know what to expect, and that is all that they are prepared to believe in."[10] European mythic preparation superseded the specificities of aboriginal life to such an extent that Bernard W. Sheehan concludes, "Europeans knew what they would find in the New World long before experience had an opportunity to intrude on their convictions."[11] For this reason, Eric Cheyfitz, in his study of the paradigm mapped out by *The Tempest* for colonial encounters, asserts: "The dialogue between Caliban and Prospero/Miranda is not a dialogue, but

a monologue, an ideological set piece that will be used again and again to rationalize, in one form or another, European imperialism in the New World."[12] Donne's intent, in his sermon to the Virginia Company, was that all adventurers to the colony would become witnesses, and, in effect, preachers of God's Word. They could play Prospero to the aboriginals' Caliban.

Donne, supported by St. Paul (Rom. 2.14-16), viewed aboriginal people as equivalent to "the natural man" who, prepared by reason, may be led to grace.[13] Ironically, Donne's willingness to accept aboriginal people as having a common ancestor with Europeans permits the otherness of their own narrative to be discounted. The natives' story does not need to be heard because it is already known—it is on par with the Old Testament, the natural law, the law of the Gentiles. As in *The Tempest*, the great symbol of inclusion and assimilation by means of the power of eloquence is the book. Thus Donne is able to affirm the humanity of the native in a comment like this: "A man is thy Neighbor, by his Humanity, not by his Divinity; by his Nature, not by his Religion: a Virginian is thy Neighbor, as well as a Londoner; and all men are in every good mans Diocess, and Parish" (4:110). At the same time, Donne acknowledges the potential of every human being to be included in God's book, which is simultaneously the European metanarrative. Thus, Donne affirms: "he that hears no Sermons, he that reads no Scriptures, hath the Bible without book . . ." (2:74). God's providence is shot through the whole of creation: "And indeed the Scriptures are but a paraphrase, but a comment, but an illustration of that booke of Creatures. And therefore, though the Scriptures onely deliver us the doctrine of the Trinity, clearely, yet there are some impressions, some obumbrations of it, in Nature too" (3:264). If God's providence is proclaimed by the Book of the Scriptures and by the Book of Nature, the book of one's personal history is further evidence of divine influence: "Yea, here God opens another book to him, his manuall, his bosome, his pocket book, his *Vade Mecum*, the Abridgement of all Nature, and all Law, his owne heart, and conscience . . . yet he cannot lose, he cannot cast away this book, that is so in him, as that it is himselfe

. . ." (9:237). If Donne's understanding of the inclusion of the natural man within the Christian story provides a means of accepting and relating to the inhabitants of Virginia, it also has the net effect of *déjà vu*.

The lack of surprise we find in Donne and other authors is hinted at by Sir Thomas Browne's comment, also on the two books of divinity: "surely the Heathens knew better how to joyne and reade these mysticall letters than wee Christians, who cast a more carelesse eye on these common Hieroglyphicks, and disdain to suck Divinity from the flowers of nature."[14] The "careless eye" and "disdain" for whatever wisdom the heathens, and thus, aboriginals, might possess, is a means of allowing for both equality with, and subjection of, a foreign people. In his sermon to the Virginia Company, Donne, after warning investors against seeking a temporal kingdom in Virginia, curiously elides the national with the supernatural mission when he prophesies: "You shall add persons to this Kingdome, and to the Kingdome of heaven, and adde names to the Bookes of our Chronicles, and to the Booke of Life" (4:281). In this passage, using the metaphor of the book again, Donne easily conjoins English chronicles with the book of the elect. The Word of God, by means of its being "dilated, diffused into a Sermon" (5:56), and, in turn, manifested by the adventurers to Virginia, will transform the inhabitants into itself. In the process, native people will become subjects of both the heavenly king and King James.

The image of native people being gathered into God's book by means of the preacher's power of eloquence is related, in Donne's thought, to an anticipation of the regaining of Paradise. The image of the New World as Paradise was a familiar one in contemporary literature.[15] William Symonds, for instance, declared that Virginia was "a Land more like the garden of Eden: which the Lord planted, then any part else of all the earth."[16] In Donne's Virginia Company sermon, he speaks rather uncharacteristically in an apocalyptic manner, suggesting that the final consummation cannot occur until Christ has been preached throughout the world; that is, until Christ has been preached in America:

> Before the ende of the world come, before this mortality shall put on immortalitie, before the Creature shall be delivered of the

> bondage of corruption under which it groanes, before the Martyrs under the Altar shalbe silenc'd, before al things shal be subdued to *Christ,* his kingdome perfited, and the last Enemy Death destroied, the Gospell must be preached to those men to whom ye send; to all men. Further and hasten you this blessed, this joyfull, this glorious consummation of all, and happie reunion of all bodies to their Soules, by preaching the *Gospell* to those men. (4:280)

Before the reunification of bodies and souls, earth and heaven, humankind and divinity occurs, the Gospel must incorporate the native people into itself. Indeed, Donne expands William Crashaw's earlier image of God's "bridge for men to pass from *England* to *Virginea*"[17] to a more comprehensive image: England, "which is but as the Suburbs of the old world" becomes "a Bridge, a Gallery to the newe; to join all that shall never grow old, the Kingdome of heaven . . ." (4:280-81). In effect, the mission to Virginia becomes the means of gaining heaven. For Donne the linkage of New World and Paradise was not only sequential, but also simultaneous. Elsewhere, Donne links colony with Paradise when he comments on the divine plan for humankind:

> When *Paradise* should have extended, as man should have multiplied, and every holy family, every religious Colony have constituted a new Paradise . . . all the world should have been a continuall Garden of Paradises, when all affections should have been subjects, and all creatures servants, and all wives helpers, then life was a sincere blessing. (7:358-59)

This vision of orderly subjection encapsulates Donne's sense of how God's benevolence should be transplanted throughout the world. In a sinful world, the traces of Paradise cannot be restored without God's corrective Word also being transplanted with each colony. Consequently, it is by means of the eloquence of verbal profession—witnessing to the Gospel—that Christ possesses America. This missionary action is, imagistically, the means of re-entering Paradise: "howsoever the heart be the center in which the Holy Ghosts rests, the

tongue is the Spheare, in which he moves: And therefore, sayes S. *Cyril*, as God set the Cherubim with a fiery sword, to keep us out of Paradise, so he hath set the Holy Ghost in fiery tongues to let us in againe" (6:122).

Throughout his sermons, Donne asserts the power of eloquence over the hearers of the Gospel. Importantly, however, this power is almost never seen as coercive, but persuasive. This structural principle in Donne's thought applies to many situations. In one sermon, Donne seems anxious to distinguish the proper workings of God's word upon the individual conscience from the brutal methods employed in some Catholic countries. Even the reproof of the Holy Spirit "is but an argument, it is but convincing, it is not destroying; it is not an Inquisition, a prison, a sword, an axe, a halter, a fire . . ." (6:319). This principle is likewise applied to discoveries in the New World, since Donne ironically places this genocidal boast in Ignatius Loyola's mouth: "if the opinion of the *Dominicans* had prevailed, *That the inhabitants should be reduced, onely by preaching and without violence,* certainely their 200000 of men would scarce in so many ages have beene brought to a 150 which by our meanes was so soone performed."[18] Donne's comments on the power of reason, argument, and preaching, as opposed to violence, seem reassuring, except that argument itself may be viewed, on a metaphoric level, as embedded in the notion of possession; as Cheyfitz explains, "In the West an argument is won (a doubt is transformed into a certainty, or identity) when one combatant is sole possessor of the place of that argument, having driven the other claimant out."[19] It is therefore not surprising that despite his anti-coercive sentiments, Donne was able to justify the expropriation of land from the aboriginal people within a particular context, the winning of souls to Christ as the "principall ende" (4:274) of the enterprise, a goal that harkens back to the original Virginia patents.[20] In the Virginia sermon, Donne's reasoning resonates with a number of other contemporary thinkers when he states:

> In the Law of *Nature* and *Nations*, A Land never inhabited, by any, or utterly derelicted and immemorially abandoned by the

> former Inhabitants, becomes theirs that wil posesse it. So also is it, if the inhabitants doe not in some measure fill the Land, so as the Land may bring foorth her increase for the use of men: for as a man does not become proprietary of the Sea, because he hath two or three Boats, fishing in it, so neither does a man become Lord of a maine Continent, because hee hath two or three Cottages in the Skirts thereof. . . . *The whole world, all Mankinde must take care, that all places be emprov'd, as farre as may be, to the best advantage of Mankinde in generall.* Againe if the Land be peopled, and cultivated by the people, and that Land produce in abundance such things, for want whereof their neghbours, or others (being not enemies) perish, the Law of *Nations* may justifie some force, in seeking, by permutation of other commodities which they neede, to come to some of theirs. (4:274)

In Donne's logic, land may be taken if it is empty or virtually empty or if it might be improved; property may be taken if need requires and the neighboring people are not enemies. Contradictory tendencies present themselves in these propositions. Even if one sets aside English inability to recognize a system of common land-holding among the Algonquian people, one is inclined to ask which of these conditions actually applied to the colonial situation.[21] It is difficult to imagine, for instance, how "utterly derelicted and immemorially abandoned" land might "produce in abundance" those materials which the colonists lack. From a later vantage point, it is difficult to ascertain, given the settlers' overwhelming dependence on native agriculture and food production, that it was the natives who were in want of improvement. Finally, it is difficult to imagine, given the settlers' constant demand for more land and food and the subsequent massacre by natives, how the natives and settlers would not now describe each other as enemies. Donne repeated the commonplace perception of native people and thus perpetuated a kind of double-think. As Sheehan comments: "Had the colonists not drawn freely upon the output of native farming they could not have survived, yet they continued to see Indians as savages, immature and incompetent people who lived in a blighted world of endemic scar-

city."[22] Donne's comment on the natives' occupation of land recalls several sources, such as Robert Gray's equally legalistic commentary:

> Some affirme, and it is likely to be true, that these Sauages have no particular proprietie in any part or parcell of that Countrey, but only a generall residencie there, as wild beasts have in the forrest, for . . . there is not *meum & tuum* amongest them: so that if the whole lande should bee taken from them, there is not a man that can complaine of any particular wrong done unto him.[23]

This anxious ambivalence as to how to assess the native people—either savage (unsettled, like beasts) or civilized (creating abundance, sustaining the dependent settlers)—is present in Donne's text and those texts of many commentators of the time. Intriguingly, the argument of eloquence has a way of translating itself into territory, and Donne's official agenda, as announced in the Virginia sermon, seems subverted by the text's more submerged demands. The fact that preachers of the time were doing significant ideological work in empire building was not lost on England's rivals. As early as 1609, the Spanish ambassador noted that the Virginia promoters "have seen to it that the ministers, in their sermons, stress the importance of filling the world with their religion. . . ."[24] While Donne explicitly warns members of the Virginia Company that they are not to seek a temporal kingdom, he seems to have strayed more into the line of thinking of one of his contemporaries, William Crashaw, who explained concerning the Virginia adventure, "he that seekes only or principally *spirituall* things, God will reward him both with those *spirituall and temporal* things."[25]

One of the most familiar ways that the English had of envisaging America was as a beautiful and desirable woman, as Donne's own "Elegie: Going to Bed" makes clear. The name of Virginia was coined as a tribute by Ralegh to Queen Elizabeth in 1585, but was seen as a most appropriate choice, according to Robert Beverley in *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705) since the land "did seem to retain the virgin purity and plenty of the first creation, and the people their primitive innocence."[26] The image accords well with Donne's verse

letter "To the Countess of Huntington" which begins, "That unripe side of earth, that heavy clime / That gives us man up now, like *Adams* time / Before he ate. . . ."[27] Donne's sermon to the Virginia Company builds on the sexual imagery of bodies—male dominance, female virginity, and the planting of seed. It thus circulates with other colonial material, such as William Symonds's prayer: "*Lord finish this good worke thou hast begun*; and marry this land, a pure Virgine to thy kingly sonne Christ Iesus; so shall thy name bee magnified: and we shall have a Virgin or Maiden Britaine, a comfortable addition to our Great Britaine."[28] Needless to say, for Virginia to be the bride of Christ, she must first be the bride of King James. However, before Donne's use of body imagery can be discussed, it is important to record the anxiety of the English associated in what they desire in the virginal New World.

In English colonial ideology, the inhabitants of Virginia were both innocent Eden-dwellers and worshipers of Satan. What frequently happens in colonial encounters is that the fears and desires of the colonists concerning their own identity and behavior are projected onto the stereotype of the natives and their culture. Homi Bhabba formulates the problem by suggesting that "It is precisely this function of the stereotype as phobia and fetish that . . . opens the royal road to colonial fantasy."[29] Peter Hulme analyzes the settlers' mythology concerning the natives they encountered in this way:

> But even more to the point is that the claims [of the colonists] were a systematic projection of *European* behaviour on to native Americans. In those early years it tended to be the Europeans who were not 'settled', living from plunder and barter; it was the Europeans who proved incapable of feeding themselves from the fertile soil; it was the Europeans whose duplicity and cunning kept their colonies alive by manipulating the trust of their hosts; and eventually by betraying it.[30]

One could say that native peoples represent both what the colonizers desire (dominance, wealth, paradisal blessings) and what they fear they may become by such mastery: savage, brutal, demonic.[31]

The colonial literature abounds with instances of projected desire and fear. For instance, in Alexander Whitaker's *Good Newes from Virginia* (1613), the writer exposes his anxiety about the mission in Virginia when on the one hand he describes a civil society among the natives, while on the other he laments the lack of it among the English themselves. He finds these conditions among the aboriginals:

> there is a ciuill gouernement amongst them which they strictly obserue, and shew thereby that the law of Nature dwelleth in them: for they haue a rude kinde of Common-wealth, and rough gouernement, wherein they both honour and obey their Kings, Parents, and Gouernours, both greater and lesse, they obserue the limits of their owne possessions, and incroach not vpon their neighbours dwellings. Murther is a capitall crime scare heard of among them: adultery is most seuerely punished, and so are their other offences. These vnnurtured grounds of reason in them, may serue to incourage vs: to instruct them in the knowledge of the true God. . . .[32]

In contrast, he worries that the mission to Virginia is not as successful as it might be because of the failings of both the sponsors and the participants in the venture:

> Some of our Aduenturers in *London* haue been most miserable couetous men, sold ouer to Vsurie, Extortion and Oppression. Many of the men sent hither haue bin Murtherers, Theeues, Adulterers, idle persons, and what not besides, all which persons God hateth euen from his very soule: how then could their almes or any thing else which they doe, be pleasing vnto God?[33]

Official ideology demands that the natives be imagined as barbarians, yet they seem to display traits of civility that the English themselves lack. The same kind of confusion exists in Robert Gray's account of life in Virginia: "the people are sauage and incredibly rude, they worhip the diuel, offer their young children in sacrifice vnto him, wander vp and downe like beasts, and in manners and conditions, differ very litle from

beasts, hauing no Art, nor science, nor trade, to imploy themselues, or give themselues unto, yet by nature louing and gentle, and desirous to imbrace a better condition."[34] Here the natives can be both "loving and gentle," yet offer their children up in the worship of Satan. The child sacrifice reference is most likely an initiation rite that was misunderstood by the English.[35] Interestingly, the natives were very reluctant to give up their own children to the English so that they could be educated with an eye to conversion. As Governor Yeardley had commented, "how difficult a thing it was at that time to obtain any of their children with the consent and good liking of their parents, by reason of their tenderness of them, and fear of hard usage by the English."[36]

Donne was clearly aware of the export of barbarous elements of the English to Virginia, though he emphasized the value of redemption of criminals rather than their bad influence on the colony or their example to the native people. Francis Bacon's commentary warns of the dangers inherent in using Virginia as a dumping ground: "It is a Shamefull and Unblessed Thing, to take the Scumme of People, and Wicked Condemned Men, to be the People with whom you *Plant*: And not only so, but it spoileth the *Plantation*; For they will ever live like Rogues, and not fall to worke, but be Lazie, and doe Mishchiefe, and spend Victuals, and be quickly weary, and then Certifie over to their Country, to the Discredit of the Plantation."[37] Donne preferred to view the situation positively, seeing the chance for a new life for criminals who would otherwise be lost. He suggests that those who will be rescued by Virginia will not be hardened criminals. Virginia offers such unfortunates an alternative:

> It shall redeeme many a wretch from the Jawes of death, from the hands of the Executioner, upon whom, perchaunce a small fault, or perchance a first fault, or perchance a fault heartily and sincerely repented, perchance no fault, but malice, had otherwise cast a present, and ignominious death. It shall sweep your streets, and wash your dores, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and imploy them: and truely, if the whole countrey were but such a *Bridewell*, to force idle persons to work, it had a good use. (4:272)

Virginia as a prison work-house will cleanse England and offer reformation to petty criminals. The fact remains that many of England's ambassadors of Christ were those whom England had declared undesirable and guilty of capital crimes. The barbarism that the English feared was perhaps not so much in the woods as in the plantations themselves.

Perhaps the most telling of examples concerning the English projection of fear onto the native people was in the most barbarous of charges against them: cannibalism. Apparently John Smith revealed his concern when he addressed the colonists in the "starving time," the winter of 1609-10, saying that if they had not been forced to find their own sustenance, "they would all have starved, and have eaten one another."[38] Robert Beverley in 1705 recalled the period as one where the colonists were driven beyond the limits of civilized behavior: "They continued in these scanty circumstances till they were at last reduced to such extremity as to eat the very hides of their horses, and the bodies of the Indians they had killed; and sometimes also, upon a pinch, they would not disdain to dig them up again to make a homely meal of after they had been buried."[39] Clearly, the colonists' fear of the native people was not simply the fear of unfamiliar behavior, but fear of what they knew were the most barbarous tendencies in themselves projected onto a strange and foreign people.

In effect, the other side of the coin of Donne's "a Virginian is thy Neighbour... and all men are in every good mans Diocess, and Parish" (4:110), a recognition of a common humanity, is the recognition of a common inhumanity, the possibility that an English person might become like native Virginians—at least as they had been imaginatively constructed. John Brinsley, in an educational tract (1622), warned of the dangers of colonists consorting with native people, "especially of falling away from God to Sathan, and that themselves, or their posterity should become utterly savage, as they are."[40] Even the Virginia promoters' plea for compassion for native people had a darker side. Natives should be considered as the English were before they were civilized by the Romans. Several contemporary accounts seem to

anticipate Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, speaking aboard ship on the Thames: "the darkness was here yesterday."[41] Robert Johnson suggests that compassion begins "by comparing our present happinesse with our former ancient miseries, wherein wee had continued brutish, poore and naked Britanes to this day, if *Iulius Caesar* with his Romane Legions (or some other) had not laid the ground to make vs tame and ciuill."[42] John Rolfe, eventually husband of Pocahontas, pitying the natives for their ignorant willingness to "run headlong" into "perpetual damnation," is led to recall the history of his own people: "for what were we before the Gospel of Christ shined amongst us?"[43] Among the English, there was a strong anxiety wrapped within their mission to Virginia that the line between barbarism and civility was thin indeed. The strong colonial injunctions against "going native" give legal proof of this anxiety. As Sheehan describes the situation, "Few Indians went over to the colonists, though more colonists than the English wished to remember threw in with the Indians."[44]

Perhaps Donne's version of "the darkness was here yesterday" occurs in his recognition of barbarism in England's European cousins and spiritual ancestors, Roman Catholics. It was a commonplace in seventeenth-century English discourse to link popery with devilish idolatry; thus, in turn, native religion and Catholicism had definite links. Alexander Whitaker paralleled the lives of native priests with Catholic monks. These priests "are a generation of vipers euen of Sathans owne brood. The manner of their life is much like to the popish Hermits of our age. . . ."[45] A prayer, published in 1612, to be read in Virginia "vpon the Court of Guard" concludes with the petition: ". . . Lord blesse England our sweet natiue countrey, saue it from Popery, this Land from heathenisme, & both from Atheisme."[46] In his Virginia Company sermon, Donne insists on the need to oppose falsehood with true religion in both Europe and Virginia, or as the sermon's text has it, "in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the Earth" (Acts 1.8). At this very tense and trying time, Donne's use of the sensitive word "Massacres" shows his linking of European barbarism with that of Virginia's natives:

According to Sheehan, the massacre was a broad retaliation for wrongs already perpetrated against the native people. Savagery, such as the English had projected onto the native people, now could be practiced freely by the English themselves, in a cunning and determined way. What they had feared, manifestly outside, and covertly inside, themselves was now to be the order of the day. As George Sandys suggests, the English "will trie if wee can make them as secure as wee *were, that wee may followe their example in destroying them.*" [49] This was precisely the response that Donne was trying to guard against in his Virginia sermon. It was not *this* example that Donne wanted company members to follow, but the supposedly more benevolent course that the company had followed previously:

> when I, by way of exhortation, all this while have seem'd to tell you what should be done by you, I have, indeed, but told the Congregation, what hath beene done already: neither do I speake to move a wheel that stood still, but to keepe the wheele in due motion: nor perswade you to begin, but to continue a good worke, nor propose forreigne, but your own Examples, to do still, as you have done hitherto. (4:281)

As in epideictic poetry, fulsome praise of former actions may inspire those praised to pursue an even more virtuous course of action, seeing, as it were, the full type in the antitype. Unfortunately, as I have indicated, Donne's discourse was so enmeshed in the discourse of the time, that even such a position cannot fully stand apart from the more brutal strategems of the day.

The circulation of a particular kind of rhetoric is made plain if we consider one of Donne's most famous sonnets, "Batter my heart. . . ." Here Donne's speaker desperately cries out to God to release him from the slavery to evil. I am not suggesting that Donne had Virginia in mind when he wrote the poem, only that the situation envisaged by the poem could be, and was, applied in the New World context. The familiar scene is here, even the natural man who should be governed by reason,

> In the highest reproach to *Christ,* the Jewes said, *Samaritanus es & Dæmonium habes, Thou art a Samaritan & hast a Devill.* In our just detestation of these *Men,* we justly fasten both those upon them. For as they delight in lyes, and fill the world with weekely rumors, *Dæmonium habent,* they have a *Devill, quia mendax est & pater eius.* As they multiply assassinats upon Princes, and Massacres upon people, *Dæmonium habent,* they have a *Devill, quia homicida ab initio:* as they tosse, and tumble, and dispose kingdomes, *Dæmonium habent,* they have a *Devill, Omnia hæc dabo* was the Devils complement; but as they mingle truthes and falshoods together in Religion, as they carry the word of GOD, and the Traditions of Men, in an even balance, *Samaritani sunt,* they are *Samaritanes.* (4:278)

Donne seems to be suggesting that the massacre of English colonists by native Virginians is not that dissimilar from the actions of papists elsewhere. In short, Donne seems to embody the same anxiety about the status of the English as a civil and godly people. The ability to become barbarous is always in close ontological proximity to oneself. The fact that Ireland and Virginia were often compared in early modern discourse, in the project of civilizing, underscores this perception.[47]

Ironically the worst that the colonists might do, their knowledge of their own barbarism, applied to the natives, was released after the massacre of settlers; all the projections, all the secret fears about the native people seemed to come true, and thus, their own barbarism was released as well. Interestingly, Sheehan describes the situation *before* the fateful event:

> It was a brutal age, and the English acted as might be expected. Yet, in their treatment of the native people, the doctrine of savagism seemed to release them from whatever inhibitions might have tempered their behavior toward people fortunate enough to claim civility. Faced with a savage enemy, the English demonstrated a startling capacity for savage behavior.[48]

but is nevertheless enslaved by the enemy of God and humankind. The solution demanded by the speaker is the intervention of such divine force that the unnatural marriage to Satan will be broken:

> Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
> But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue,
> Yet dearely'I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
> Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,
> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
> Except you'enthall mee, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.[50]

In Donne's version, the sinful soul itself cries out to God. In Robert Johnson's *The New Life of Virginea*, the same imagery was applied to the native people. In his view, the chief aim was "to bring those infidell people from the worship of Divels to the service of God." The method of achieving this result is predictable: "And this is the knot that you must unite [untie?], or cut asunder, before you can conquer those sundrie impediments, that will surely hinder all other proceedings, if this be not first preferred."[51] His methods of effecting this divorce included the educating of native children, conferring with elders, and offering equality and protection. After the massacre, the metaphor acquired new force and urgency. As Edward Waterhouse enjoined, "our hands which before were tied with gentlenesse and fair vsage are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Sauages: not vntying the knot, but cutting it."[52] In this rhetoric, the unconscious, unspoken cry comes from the native people themselves: they are in need of divine rescue, and God's English messengers are employed to carry out the divorce and ravishment. Robert Johnson believed that the elect were to be found among the natives and yearned for the liberation of the Gospel: "who can doubt or say, but even amongst these, God may have his speciall numbers from whose neckes hee will now remove that heavie yoake of bondage. . . ."[53] Such an action, according to William Crashaw, "shall lead *captiuitie captiue,* and redeeme the soules of men

from bondage."[54] In this context, the extent to which the dialogue between England and America has become a monologue, just like Prospero to Caliban, is dramatic. The preacher Daniel Price, in 1609, had placed the requisite words in Virginia's mouth: "the angel of Virginia crieth out to this land as the angel of Macedonia did to Paul: O come and help us."[55] The seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company presented a smiling native woman saying, "Come over and help us."[56] English discourse of the period accumulated to appear to present the natives as inviting their own destruction.[57] The practical means of destruction were much less poetic; in response to the 1622 massacre, Waterhouse suggested:

> victorie of them may bee gained many waies; by force, by surprize, by famine in burning their Corne, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, by breaking their fishing Weares, by assailing them in their huntings, whereby they get the greatest part of their sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastiues to teare them, which take this naked, tanned, deformed Sauages, for no other then wild beasts, and are so fierce and fell vpon them, that they fear them worse then their old Deuill which thy worship, supposing them to be a new and worse kinde of Deuils then their owne.[58]

Enmeshed in the complex English desire for what the New World had to offer is a cluster of sexual images and bodily motifs. As we have seen, British North America was often imaged as a virgin, eagerly willing to be dominated by masculine force—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—in order to become fruitful. Donne's imagery participates in this discursive evocation. The seed to be planted is of course the Gospel; the chief purpose of the Company is "the propagation of Religion, and the conversion of the people" (4:281). It is appropriate, therefore, that in warning the members of the Virginia Company not to be daunted by their setbacks, Donne begins a series of examples of God taking time to accomplish his works, using images of seeding and pregnancy:

> Beloved, use godly meanes, and give *God* his leisure. You cannot beget a Sonne, and tell the Mother, I will have this Sonne borne within five Moneths; nor, when he is borne, say, you will have him past daunger of *Wardship* within five yeares. . . . Howe soone the best Husbandman, sow'd the best Seede, in the best ground? GOD cast the promise of a *Messias,* as the seede of all, in Paradise . . . and yet this *Plant* was Foure thousand yeares after before it appeared; this *Messias* Foure thousand yeares before he came. (4:270-71)

Clearly, Virginia, the virgin bride, is to be impregnated with the seed of the Gospel, the means by which Christ receives new birth in the New World. For both English husband and American wife, the pregnancy must undergo certain trials. In early modern medical practice, these trials were seen as different kinds of evacuations.

In reference to the 1622 massacre, Donne reminds Company members that God purged the earth by means of a flood. In the Virginia context, the spouse is also purged, or bled, so that she might become more healthy and vigorous: "Bee not you discouraged, if the Promises which you have made to your selves, or to others, be not so soone discharg'd; though you see not your money, though you see not your men, though a *Flood, a Flood* of *bloud* have broken in upon them, be not discouraged" (4:271). As Waterhouse had described it, ultimately, "the losse of this blood" would "make the body more healthfull."[59] England too must undergo an evacuation, the removal of the nation's criminal or unproductive elements. Donne describes Virginia's function using the imagery of bodily organs: "But it is already, not onely a *Spleene,* to draine the ill humors of the body, but a *Liver,* to breed good bloud; already the imployment breeds Mariners; already the place gives essayes, nay Fraytes of Marchantable commodities . . ." (4:272). Overpopulation had been viewed as the source of many of England's social problems, such as the "diseases of povertie, corruption of minde, and pestilent infection."[60] The American colonies seemed to offer the opportunity to dispose of disease-causing pollutants. As Crashaw had earlier envisaged, "hereby we shall honour our selues and strengthen ourselues by propagating our owne religion . . . hereby we shall rectifie

and reforme many disorders which in this mightie and populous state are scarce posibly to be reformed without evacuation. . . ."[61]

In much of early colonial literature, there is the sense that the failure to transplant may endanger the health of the parent country. One of the fears is that of a warrior nation gone soft. Robert Johnson imagines that the fate of ancient Rome might befall the English, "so effeminating their valour with idlenesse and security, it brought confusion and ruine to their state."[62] It is important that the sexual overtones of "planting" remain available in order to understand the possibilities inherent in this colonial discourse. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* quotes Matthiolus in order to warn of sexual abstinence: "*some through bashfulnesse abstained from Venery, and thereupon became very heavy and dull. . . .*" Burton also refers to Galen on the same subject: "*if this naturall seed bee over-long kept (in some parties) it turnes to poison.*"[63] Donne's concern with hygienic cleansing of both England and America is related to more complex medical and sexual attitudes concerning nations as bodies.

The issue of the quality of immigrants transported to Virginia is also related to a concern for unwillingness of many of these immigrants to work. We have already seen Donne's positive appraisal of Virginia as a place "to force idle persons to work" (4:272), and it is pertinent here to see Donne's attitude toward the disciplining of the body. J. Martin Evans has stated, concerning *Paradise Lost*, that "in no other version of the biblical story is the necessity of cultivating the garden so emphatically asserted."[64] Donne's numerous homiletic comments on labor in the garden demonstrate firm antecedents, however. These comments also circulate freely with colonial attitudes and relate to the prominence of indentured labor in Virginia.[65] The writers of *A Trve Declaration of the Estate of the Colonie in Virginia* (1610) comment disparagingly on the sloth of the immigrants and relate idleness to treason: "our mutinous loiterers would not sow with prouidence, and therefore they reaped the fruits of too deare-bought repentance. . . . God sels vs all things for our labour, when *Adam* himselfe might not liue in paridice without dressing the garden."[66] The attitude accorded well with Donne's own pronouncements: "even in Paradise, the bed of all

ease, yet there was labour required . . ." (6:140). Elsewhere, analyzing the importance of an embodied spiritual life, Donne asserts: "*Adam* was not put into Paradise, onely in that Paradise to contemplate the future Paradise, but to dresse and to keep the present . . ." (7:104). Finally, in a sermon on joy, Donne tries to evoke the value and delight in worke: "*Adam* in the state of Innocency had abundant occasion of continuall rejoycing; but yet even in that joyfull state he was *to labour, to dresse and to keep the Garden*" (10:219). So, while Virginia may excite expectations of Eden, enhanced by the sexual overtones of sowing in a virgin land, nevertheless, labor that ultimately brings forth fruit is required. Read in this way, Donne's elegy takes on an ironic meaning, not only sexual but colonial in nature:

> Until I labour, I in labour lie.
> The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
> Is tir'd with standing though he never fight.[67]

In his Virginia sermon, Donne subtly presents the image of the Holy Ghost impregnating the members of the congregation with Christ, the Word, so that they might in turn impregnate Virginia with the word through the planting of the Gospel. The Holy Ghost "fell upon the hearers when he [Peter] preach'd, and it hath fallen upon every one of them, who have found motions in themselves, to propagate the *Gospell* of *Christ Iesus* by this meanes" (4:273). Since the Holy Ghost "refuses . . . no conveyance, no doore of entrance into you," claims Donne, expectation of "future profit" or the "precedent of other good men," or "the vexation of the Enemie" may have all been reasons for entering into the Virginia project. None of these interests need to be set aside, only postponed, so that the primary concern of planting the Gospel may assume its proper place (4:273). Without this objective, Company members will find themselves impotent, without the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish their mission. As Donne describes the situation, the Company members will become "*Intestable*," unable to witness, to give or receive goods as a result of a testament, unable to provide as a

parent to progeny. To be a proper witness as a Christian means "to be like *Christ*" (4:275), and thus to "preach in your just actions" (4:277).

To develop these and the previous metaphors as set out in their sources, one could say that God uses many means of attraction to lure the English to the beauties of the virgin land. The settlers effect the will of King James to espouse Virginia on behalf of his Savior. To prove England's potency, its ability to leave a lasting testament, the seed that is sown must be the Gospel, so that the child that springs from Virginia's womb is again Christ, as manifested in the transported English and especially the converted natives. In this way all the witnesses may become a part of the great testament of the elect, the Will of God. It is hardly surprising that Donne concludes his sermon to the Virginia Company by summoning the image of the Company itself as a body, complete with King James as head, the administrators as brain, clergy as eyes, colonists as feet, laborers as hands, and all those affected by the venture as the heart (4:282). Upon this body, Donne asks divine blessing, thus recalling Robert Johnson's earlier assurance for the project: "I doe not doubt, but God who effecteth oft the greatest ends by smallest meanes, and hath so farre blest those few hands as to procure this birth, will likewise still assist the same to bring it up with honour."[68]

In the end, the official objectives that Donne set out in his sermon to the Virginia Company failed. Native conversion was held to be an unrealistic possibility. The colonists waged war on the natives, the project of an Indian college was abandoned, and the whole Virginian enterprise lost its evangelical edge. Donne could be viewed as part of a losing faction. However, his involvement in the discourse of colonialism was more complex than Donne could have appreciated. The extent of Donne's involvement cannot be properly assessed without seeing his words as part of a larger network of discursive practices on the subject of Virginia. Louis Althusser has observed: "It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are 'obviousnesses') obviousness as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the 'still, small voice of conscience'): 'That's obvious! That's right! That's true!'"[69]

While Donne made a significant stand to diminish the damaging impact of the Virginia venture, he contributed to the imaginative force and the religious authority that ensured that English dominance and coercion became a reality. His role was to participate in the "obviousness" of the providential mission to Virginia. Despite his admirable motives in accepting the inherent value of native people, and their place in the Kingdom of God, his harmful effects may be traced in a complex of attitudes and rhetoric. I have attempted to show how Donne denied the substantiality of a native narrative by making the native equivalent to the natural man. In doing so, Donne indicates that the natural man's only destiny is to become converted to Christ, an endeavor that gains souls for Christ and subjects for England simultaneously. The desire for the Virginian territory in Donne's thought is conveyed in paradisal and sexual terms. Hidden within such intimate desires are fears of America—projections of what the English find distasteful, actually or potentially, in themselves—barbarism, criminality, idolatrous popery. The English, after the massacre of 1622, felt empowered to sever America from the power of the Devil, a perspective which finds its most memorable expression in Donne's poetry. The colonial desire, played out in sexual terms, is politically a joining of James and his virgin territory, thus ensuring a legitimate planting or ravishment, and ultimately, the birth of a Christian faith in America. Despite his scepticism about empire-building and his warnings against motives of a temporal kingdom, Donne finds himself implicated in the eloquent, discursive conquest of the New World.

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Notes

1. Donne's attitudes towards the New World have been discussed by M. Thomas Hester, "Donne's (Re)Annunciation of the Virgin(ia Colony) in 'Elegy XIX,'" *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 49-64; Robert L. Hickey, "Donne and Virginia," *Philological Quarterly* 26 (1947): 181-92; Stanley Johnson, "John Donne and the Virginia Company," *ELH* 14 (1947): 127-38; Rodrigo Lazo, "In Search of El Dorado: Desire and History in Donne's Language of Colonization," *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 269-86; Moelwyn W. Merchant, "Donne's Sermon to the Virginia Company, 13 November 1622," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration* (London: Methuen, 1972) 433-52; Perry Miller, "Religion and Society in the Early Literature of Virginia," *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard, 1956) 99-140; R. V. Young, "'O my America, my new-found-land' : Pornography and Imperial Politics in Donne's *Elegies*," *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 35-48. More recently, Walter S. H. Lim as investigated Donne's attitude to the English colonial project in Virginia, particularly in terms of contemporary ideas concerning the aboriginal people in relation to natural law. Lim considers Donne's colonialist perspective by reading his work alongside Samuel Purchas's "Virginias Verger" (1625). See *The Arts of Empire: The Poetics of Colonialism from Ralegh to Milton* (Newark: University of Delaware P; London: Associated University Presses, 1998) 64-103.

2. Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London,* 4 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906-35), 3: 557.

3. Quoted in Stanley Johnson 133.

4. *The Sermons of John Donne,* eds. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1953-62), 4: 280. Subsequent references to Donne's sermons are to this edition, with volume and page numbers given within the text.

5. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations.* (New York: Schocken, 1986), p. 256.

6. See, for example, Paul Brown, "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism,* eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985) pp. 48-71; Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century," *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 16-39; Martin J. Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic:* Paradise Lost *and the Discourse of Colonialism.* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP 1996).

7. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1792.* (London: Methuen, 1986) p. 156.

8. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince and The Discourses,* trans. Christian E. Detmold (New York: Random House, 1940) p. 146. Also see Lim's assessment, p.

84: Donne articulated "a vision of theological imperialism that, despite its ostensible disavowal of physical violence, nevertheless uses the language of transformation and cultural appropriation."

9. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), p. 54.

10. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* (New York: Grove, 1967) 84.

11. *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), p. 3.

12. *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from* The Tempest *to* Tarzan (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), p. 159.

13. See H. C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian, 1500-1600.* (London: Duckworth, 1979), p. 127-32.

14. *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne,* ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 4 vols. (London: Faber, 1964), 1: 25.

15. See Sheehan 9-37; Evans; Porter 43.

16. *Virginia. A Sermon Preached at White-Chappel . . . 25. April. 1609* (London, 1609), sig. 26.

17. *A Sermon Preached in London . . . Febr. 21. 1609* (London, 1610) E1v.

18. *Ignatius His Conclave*, ed. T. S. Healy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969) 69.

19. Cheyfitz 118.

20. Evans 24.

21. See Cheyfitz 57-58.

22. Sheehan 115.

23. *A Good Speed to Virginia (1609),* ed. Wesley Craven (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1937), sig. C3v-C4r.

24. Pedro de Zúñiga, "To Philip III," [2/] 12 April 1609, item 47 of *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter 1606-1609*, ed. Philip L. Barbour, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 2:259.

25. Crashaw G3r.

26. Quoted in Porter 230.

27. *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1967) p. 214.

28. Symonds A3v.

29. "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Literature, Politics, and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1978-84*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (London and New York: Methuen, 1986) p. 159.

30. Hulme 167.

31. Here I am adapting Elsie Mitchie's conceptual frame for how the "oriental despot" was viewed in nineteenth-century England to the natives in Virginia in the seventeenth century. See "White Chimpanzees and Oriental Despots: Racial Stereotyping and Edward Rochester," Beth Newman, ed., *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (Boston and New York: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1996) 591. See also Lim, p.

72: "European desire to rape the land cannot be extricated from European anxieties about being raped: by the traitor, the hybrid, the erotic American native."

32. *Good Newes from Virginia* (1613; [New York]: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, [1936]), p. 26-27.

33. Whitaker 11.

34. *Good Speed to Virginia* C2v

35. Porter 323.

36. Porter 439.

37. *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 106.

38. John Smith, "A Map of Virginia," item 63, *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter 1606-1609*, ed. Philip L Barbour, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 2: 446-47.

39. Quoted in Porter 388.

40. Quoted in Sheehan 48.

41. Ross C. Murfin, ed., *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (New York: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1989) 20.

42. "Nova Britannia: Offering Most Excellent fruites by Planting in Virginia," *Tracts and Other Papers, Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America from the Discovery of the Country to the Year 1776,* ed. Peter Force, 4 vols, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), 1:14.

43. Quoted in Porter 410.

44. Sheehan 6; see James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America," *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), pp. 168-206.

45. Whitaker 26.

46. "Articles, Lawes, and Orders, Divine, Politique, and Martiall for the Colony in Virginea," Force, ed., 3:68.

47. See Sheehan 55 and Porter 203.

48. Sheehan 169.

49. Kingsbury, ed., 4:71.

50. Shawcross, ed., 344.

51. Force, ed., 1:18.

52. Kingsbury, ed., 3:556.

53. "New Life of Virginea," Force, ed., 1:8.

54. Crashaw, K4v.

55. Quoted in Porter 350.

56. Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner, eds., *The English Literatures of America 1500-1800* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 306.

57. At the conclusion of William Crashaw's sermon, published 1610, is a dialogue among God, England, and Virginia in which the words of scripture are placed in each character's mouth, including Virginia's declaration from Psalm 118,

"*Blessed bee hee that commeth to vs in the name of the Lord.*" See Crashaw L2v.

58. Kingsbury, ed., 3:557-58.

59. Kingsbury, ed., 3:556.

60. Robert Johnson, "New Life of Virginia," Force, ed., 1:21.

61. Crashaw K2v-K3r.

62. "Nova Britannia," Force, ed., 1:26-27.

63. Eds. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, Rhonda L. Blair, 3 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989-94) 1:230.

64. Evans 80.

65. See Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1947). Lim also stresses the importance of labor in the colonial literature; see, for example, p. 95: "The Lockean concept of 'property' as materialized by 'labor' is central to interpreting not only Donne's rationale for involvement in Virginia, but also the conflicting views of land held by the colonists in and natives of America."

66. Force, ed., 3:15.

67. Shawcross, ed., 57.

68. "New Life of Virginea," Force, ed., 1:24.

69. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992), p. 54.