John Donne Journal
Vol. 28 (2009)

An Unpublished Manuscript on John Donne: Retrospect and Prospect

Chanita Goodblatt

Evelyn Simpson, scholar of Donne's prose works and co-editor (with George Potter) of the twentieth-century edition of his *Sermons*,[1] left behind several unpublished manuscripts upon her death in 1963. Working with "notes . . . found among her papers," Simpson's friend and fellow Donnean scholar Helen Gardner (with Timothy Healy) completed the anthology of *John Donne: Selected Prose*, while Mabel Potter (George Potter's widow) published Simpson's essay "The Local Setting of Henry Vaughan's Poetry."[2] A third, typescript manuscript, entitled "Donne and the Elizabethan Stage,"[3] can most probably be dated from the period between 1942 and the mid-1950s.[4]

---

[1] *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–1962).

[2] See Gardner and Healy, eds., *John Donne: Selected Prose*, chosen by Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. v; Evelyn Mary Simpson, "The Local Setting of Henry Vaughan's Poetry," *Anglo-Welsh Review* 21 (1972): 60–70. Potter discusses this second essay in a letter dated 21 September 1972 (OSB MSS 7, Box 61, Folder 1268). Research on the Evelyn Simpson Papers (OSB MSS 90) and the James Osborn Papers (OSB MSS 7)—located in the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University—was facilitated by the James M. Osborn Fellowship in English Literature and History (2005).

[3] Evelyn Simpson's daughter, Mary Fleay, has graciously given me permission to cite from and publish her mother's papers.

[4] At one end, Simpson cites from Evelyn Hardy's 1942 book *Donne: A Spirit in Conflict* (London: Constable). At the other end, she cites the seventeenth-

Preparing this essay for publication has entailed several editorial decisions. First, in order to highlight Simpson's biographical approach, appropriate titles have been supplied for the previously unmarked sections, each of which designates a period in Donne's life. These periods also correspond to considerations of genre: in the "Period Before Donne's Marriage (1591–1601)" the focus is on verse and prose letters, as well as on the *Satyres;* in the "Period After Donne's Marriage (1602–1614)" the focus is on the prose letters, the *Problems*, and The *Second Anniversary*; in the "Period after Donne's Ordination (1615–1631)" the focus is on the sermons. Secondly, it has been necessary to update Simpson's citations of Donne's texts, as well as more recent scholarly work on their editing and dating. Finally, notes have been added to complete Simpson's often cryptic references to literary texts and critical essays.

A short acquaintance with the details of Evelyn Simpson's career provides an appropriate context within which to discuss this essay.[5] She earned a B. A. (Class I) at Newnham College, Cambridge, in Medieval and Modern Languages (1908), subsequently moving (1908–1914) between women's colleges at Cambridge and London: as an Associates's Research Fellow at Newnham; and as an Assistant Lecturer and M. A. student at Bedford College, London (M. A. 1912). After serving as a Red Cross nurse in World War I, Simpson took a position as a Tutor in English literature at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, and in 1922 became the first woman to be awarded the D. Phil. degree. Required to relinquish her position as Tutor at St. Hugh's College upon her marriage to Percy Simpson in 1921,[6] she continued both her scholarly and editorial work; her life-long achievements were rewarded by an Associates' Research Fellow (1946–1949) and a position of Associate at Newnham College,

---

century folio editions of Donne's sermons, rather than from her own twentieth-century edition, which was published beginning in 1953.

[5]For a more complete account of Simpson's life and career, see Chanita Goodblatt, "'The University is a Paradise, Rivers of Knowledge are There': Evelyn Mary Spearing Simpson," in *Women Editing/Editing Women: Early Modern Women Writers and the New Textualism*, ed. Ann Hollinshead Hurley and Chanita Goodblatt (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 257–283.

[6]It was not until after 1945 that married women could hold positions as Tutors in Oxford Colleges (Goodblatt, 'The University is a Paradise," p. 270).

Cambridge (1956–1963), the 1955 Rose Mary Crawshay Prize of the British Academy "for work by a woman on English Literature"[7] and the Leverhulme Research Award (1956–1958).

Simpson's editorial work on *Studley's Translations of Seneca's Agamemnon and Medea*,[8] on *Ben Jonson*,[9] as well as on Donne's prose (*The Courtier's Library*, *Essays in Divinity*, *Sermons*)[10] came at a time when the production of critical editions was coming to the fore in Renaissance studies. Her own integrated, contextual (historical, biographical) approach to editing Donne's sermons is already apparent in her early essay, "A Chronological Arrangement of Donne's Sermons"[11] (reprinted in the two editions of her book *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*);[12] it is this approach that also guides her essay on "Donne and the Elizabethan Stage." Here Simpson combines her areas of scholarly expertise: her knowledge of Elizabethan drama, demonstrated in her book *The Elizabethan Translations of Seneca's Tragedies*;[13] and her knowledge of Donne's prose works, evident in numerous essays[14] as well as in *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*.

---

[7]Cited from a letter dated 1 July 1955 (Evelyn Simpson Papers, OSB MSS 90, Box 4, Folder 100).

[8]See the book published under her birth-name of Evelyn Mary Spearing: *Studley's Translations of Seneca's Agamemnon and Medea*, edited from the Octavos of 1566 (Louvain: A. Uystpruyst, 1913).

[9]*Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–1952).

[10]Evelyn Mary Simpson, ed., *The Courtier's Library, or Catalogus librorum aulicorum incomparabilium et non vendibilium*. With a translation by Percy Simpson (London: Nonesuch Press, 1930); *Essays in Divinity*. By the late Dr Donne. Being several disquisitions, interwoven with meditations and prayers: before he entered into Holy Orders. Now made publick by his son J. D. [John Donne] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); with George Potter, *The Sermons of John Donne*.

[11]Evelyn Mary Spearing, "A Chronological Arrangement of Donne's Sermons," *Modern Language Review* 8 (1913): 468–483.

[12]Evelyn M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 and 1948).

[13]Evelyn Mary Spearing, *The Elizabethan Translations of Seneca's Tragedies* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1912).

[14]See, for example, the essays published under the name of Evelyn Mary Simpson: "Donne's 'Paradoxes and Problems," in *A Garland for John Donne*

The publication of this essay at the present time raises various fascinating issues. In retrospect, it provides a snapshot of the state of Donnean biographical, critical and editorial scholarship on the cusp of its mid- to late-twentieth-century development. Thus we have Simpson citing Herbert J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne's poems, and not the Variorum;[15] we have the citing of seventeenth-century *Sermon* folios and not the Simpson and Potter edition (or looking forward to the forthcoming Oxford edition);[16] we have the biography by Edmund Gosse and not those by R. C. Bald or Dennis Flynn.[17] Reading such an essay makes a Donnean scholar aware both of the seachange in scholarship that has occurred and of the bibliographical constraints facing Evelyn Simpson in her own projects. It also makes a reader aware of the particular scholarly situation within which Simpson worked; her collaborative editing of Ben Jonson turns her attention to his multi-faceted relationship with Donne (discussed in the essay's "Introduction" and the "Period After Donne's Marriage"). Their friendship was realized in a mutual esteem of their respective works, which Simpson uses to propose a connection between Jonson's *Catiline his Conspiracy* and Donne's *The Second Anniversary*—an approach that astutely develops biographical data into literary intertextuality.

Considering this approach in terms of its prospective relation to more recent scholarship draws attention to Simpson's distinctive contribution to Donne's involvement with Elizabethan drama. Throughout her essay Simpson not only remarks upon Donne's explicit references to theater-

---

1631–1931, ed. Theodore Spencer (1931; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), pp. 23–43; "The Literary Value of Donne's Sermons," in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Helen Gardner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 137–151.

[15]Grierson, *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912); *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, general ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995–).

[16]*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, and *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne*, general ed. Peter McCullough, 16 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[17]Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, 2 vols. (1899; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959); Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

going (in the "Period Before Donne's Marriage"), but continues to draw out possible, intriguing intertextual connections: such as that between Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and Donne's poem *The Calme* and his letter to the Countess of Bedford; and that between Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Donne's *Essay of Valour* (in the "Period After Donne's Marriage"). This move into such a potentially fruitful way of studying Donne's literary incorporation of his theater-going experiences looks towards several ensuing discussions: H. M. Richmond's tracing out of the ways in which "Shakespeare's parody of sentimental affectations" in his comedies "provides the specific model for many of the hyperbolic conceits [e.g., weeping, geography] of Donne";[18] Richard Barbieri's discussion of the influence of Shakespeare's *Richard II* on a passage in the eighth of Donne's *Devotions* (in the shared image of a king's face reflected in a mirror);[19] and Paul W. Harland's noting of the "terminology of dramatic enactment"—the use of changing voices and dialogue–in Donne's sermons."[20]

What is more, in the discussion of the sermons (in the "Period after Donne's Ordination"), Simpson looks toward—and actually moves beyond—the statement made by Victor Harris in his subsequent essay "John Donne and the Theatre." Harris writes:

> In his [Donne's] secular writings, during the years when he presumably moves among playwrights and playgoers, his derogation of the theatre is primarily directed to the pretense that flourish at the theatre, the court, and other places of fashion. In the sermons the rejection is stated more bluntly

[18]Richmond, "Donne's Master: The Young Shakespeare," *Criticism* 15 (1973): 131.

[19]As cited by Barbieri, the respective passages are: *Devotions*, "A glass is not the less brittle because a king's face is represented in it"; *Richard II*, "A brittle glory shineth in this [the King's] face" ("John Donne and Richard II: an Influence?" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26 [1975]: 57–62).

[20]Harland, "Dramatic Technique and Personae in Donne's Sermons," *ELH* 53 (1986): 709. Harland also notes scholars who have concerned themselves with this issue (p. 725, notes 1 and 3), for example: Gale Carrithers, *Donne at Sermons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972); Jeanne M. Shami, "Anatomy and Progress: The Drama of Conversion in Donne's Men of a 'Middle Nature,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53 (1983/4): 221–235.

> and unequivocally, but the basis for it has been laid long before. [21]

Unlike Harris's disputatious concept of the preacher's attitude towards contemporary drama, Simpson propitiously notes the differential ways in which Donne utilizes his references to the theater; thus "he thinks of the whole world as a theater, in which one can discover God"[22] or explains how "the theater is used to censure human behavior."[23] Simpson further speculates on the connections between these references and particular plays (for example, Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*), thereby providing a wider, and more meaningful, intertextual context. Looking retrospectively, then, at Simpson's essay, the present-day reader is certainly aware of the necessity of its updating–not solely in terms of more recent critical and editorial projects, but also in terms of the refinement of scholarly approaches that draw out the lines of her work. Thus Simpson's concern with direct influences from Elizabethan drama can be re-tuned to look prospectively towards Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which has "nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or the sources of a literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of a *textual system*."[24] For example, the images of "weeping" and "geography" can be therefore investigated in terms of their use in a variety of early modern texts, suggesting wider cultural and literary concerns. Moreover, the reading of Donne's corpus in relation to contemporary literature and events comprises a crucial dimension in present studies, such as Peter McCullough's *Sermons at Court*, Jeanne Shami's *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis*, and Gregory Kneidel's "Coscus, Queen Elizabeth, and Law in John Donne's 'Saytre II.'"[25] In

---

[21]Harris, "John Donne and the Theatre," *Philological Quarterly* 41 (1962): 268.

[22]See below, p. 87.

[23]See below, p. 89.

[24]Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 15.

[25]McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: D. S.

this light, it is quite appropriate to return to Helen Gardner, and echo her hopes that (as in the case of the anthology *John Donne: Selected Prose*) the publication of the present essay "will make more widely available the fruits of her [Simpson's] lifelong, devoted study of Donne's prose."[26]

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Donne and the Elizabethan Stage

Evelyn M. Simpson

Introduction

> *To Sir Henry Wotton. "Here's no more newes"*
> Beleeve mee Sir, in my youths giddiest dayes,
> When to be like the Court, was a playes praise,
> Playes were not so like Courts, as Courts'are like playes.[27]
>
> *Sermon on the Penitential Psalm 32:6.*
> Nor is it [true prayer] those transitory and interlocutory prayers, which out of custom and fashion we make, and still proceed in our sin; when we pretend to speake to God, but like Comedians upon a stage, turne over our shoulder, and whisper to the Devill.[28]

These two quotations, the first taken from a verse letter written on 20 July 1598,[29] and the other from an undated sermon,[30] twenty or perhaps

---

Brewer, 2003); Kneidel, "Coscus, Queen Elizabeth, and Law in John Donne's 'Saytre II,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (2008): 92–121.

[26]Gardner and Healy, eds., *John Donne: Selected Prose*, p. vi.

[27]John Donne, *Poems* (London: John Marriot and John Fletcher, 1633), p. 77. This volume is cited throughout the essay as *Poems*, followed by page number.

[28]*The Sermons of John Donne*, 9:325. All quotations from Donne's sermons are cited throughout the essay as *Sermons*, followed by volume and page numbers.

[29]Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers confirm this date, on the basis of three manuscripts (""Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of

thirty years later, exemplify the use made by Donne in poems and sermons of the images drawn from his early visits to the theater. His life covers the greatest age of English drama; Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare were about eight or nine years his senior, Ben Jonson was almost exactly his contemporary, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher were a few years younger. Donne's home was in or near London for the whole period between the production of *Tamburlaine the Great* in 1587 and the death of Fletcher in 1625.

Some writers have belittled Donne's interest in the theater. Edmund Gosse says of him that he was "wholly indifferent to Shakespeare, but eager to read the elegies of [the sixteenth-century Spanish poet Fernando de] Herrera," and he has also asserted that he turned "resolutely away from the literature of his native country, which we know he contemned."[31] More recently Evelyn Hardy, while claiming him as "always a lover of the theatre" has asserted that "those who search his works for allusions to contemporary authors, or any individual play, will be disappointed."[32] It is true that allusions to individual plays are rare in Donne's works, but in this article I have collected quite a few, and there are probably more to be found. Much the longest and striking is the tribute that he paid to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* in the Latin verses prefixed to the quarto edition of 1607, two years after the play was first acted. Donne gave them the title *Amicissimo, et meritissimo Ben: Jonson* (To the Most Friendly and Deserving Ben Jonson).

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Donne was chary of commendatory verses, and as far as we know, this Latin poem is the one and only tribute to a contemporary work, which he allowed to be printed. He rightly discerned in *Volpone* a masterpiece of its kind. Jonson's fierce

---

Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton," *Modern Philology* 81 [1984]: 364).

[30]Though undated in *LXXX Sermons*, the series on the Penitential Psalm 32 was most probably preached at St. Paul's Cathedral during the Lenten seasons of 1626–1627. This dating is a recent decision made by the editors of the forthcoming *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne*. The particular discussion of these sermons will appear in volume 12, "Sermons Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral," ed. Mary Ann Lund.

[31]Gosse, 2:177–178. Evelyn Simpson states in her manuscript footnote that she was unable to find any proof of either part of this statement.

[32]Hardy, pp. 36–37.

satiric humor appealed strongly to the Donne of 1605, embittered by poverty and disappointment, but keenly sensitive to the majestic verse and masterly construction of the play.

Period Before Donne's Marriage (1591–1601)

There can be no doubt that during the years, which Donne spent in London before his marriage, he was a frequent visitor to the theater. Sir Herbert Grierson, in his two-volume edition of Donne's *Poems*, draws attention to some playful verses addressed to Donne by his friend, Sir William Cornwallis, in which the latter invited Donne:

> If then for change of howers you seem careless
> Agree with me to lose them at the playes.[33]

Grierson also draws attention to the remark of Sir Richard Baker in his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* about his "old acquaintance . . . M[r] John Dunne, who leaving *Oxford*, lived at the *Innes of Court*, not dissolute, but very neat; a great Visiter of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great writer of conceited Verses."[34] This sentiment is confirmed by a large number of passages in Donne's verses. The earliest of such references that we can date occurs in the *Satyres*. In *Satyre 1*, written probably in 1593,[35] there is a passing reference to a man who has a great reputation as a judge of fine clothes:

> To judge of lace, pinke, panes, print, cut, and plight,
> Of all the Court, to have the best conceit;
> Our dull Comedians want him, let him goe;
> (*Poems*, p. 328)

[33]Grierson, 2:172. Grierson reproduces this verse from the following manuscript: Bodleian Library, MS Tanner, 306.

[34]Baker, *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London: E. Cotes, 1665), p. 450.

[35]Grierson dates *Satyres 1–3* to 1593, *Satyre 4* to 1597 and *Satyre 5* to 1598–1599 (2:100–105). More recently, however, Wesley Milgate dates them as following: *Satyre 1* to 1593; *Satyre 2* to 1594; *Satyre 3* to either 1594 or 1595; *Satyre 4* to between March and September 1597; *Satyre 5* to the early part of 1598. (*John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. Wesley Milgate [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967], pp. 117–165).

There is a much more interesting reference in *Satyre 2*. Donne satirically describes several kinds of poet: the man who writes rhymes to induce love, when money would plead his case more successfully; he who sends poems to great lords in hope of reward; he who writes poetry merely because it is the fashion; and also the man, who though half-starved himself, writes plays, which provide a living for actors. This playwright is described as:

> One, (like a wretch, which at Barre judg'd as dead,
> Yet prompts him which stands next, and cannot reade,
> And saves his life) gives ideot actors meanes
> (Starving himselfe) to live by his labor'd sceanes.
> As in some Organ, Puppits dance above
> And bellows pant below, which them do move.
> (*Poems*, p. 329)

Grierson comments on these lines:

> The references to poetry in the second [*Satyre*] acquire a more vivid interest when its approximate date [1593 or 1594] is remembered. In 1593 Marlowe died, the greatest of the brilliant group that reformed the stage, giving
>
> ideot actors means
> (Starving 'themselves') to live by 'their' labour'd sceanes;
>
> and Shakespeare was one of the 'ideot actors'.[36]

Personally, I should be inclined to take the lines as a reference, not to Marlowe–who, as far as we know, was never anywhere near starving and had employment under Francis Walsingham—but to such playwrights as Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd and Thomas Nashe. Greene's profligate life and miserable end in a squalid lodging in September 1592 were well known, and if Harleian MS 5110 in the British Museum (of Donne's *Satyres*) is right in its ascription of "Jhon Dunne in his Satires / Anno Domini 1593,"[37] they would be fresh in the mind of Donne's readers. There was a general belief, justified to some extent by the facts, that

[36]Grierson, 2:102.
[37]Cited from Grierson, 2:100.

Elizabethan playwrights in the years 1590 to 1600 were ill-paid and "famished"; as Nashe in a famous passage described the "followers of English Seneca"—perhaps an allusion to Kyd.[38]

In *Satyre 4* Donne describes his meeting with a persistent bore, who he tries in vain to snub, by writing:

> . . . To fit my sullennesse,
> He to another key his stile doth addresse,
> And askes, what newes?' I tell him of new playes.
> (*Poems*, p. 340)[39]

Grierson dates this *Satyre* by the reference to "the losse of Amyens" (*Poems*, p. 340) as having been written after March 1597, when that town was lost, and probably before September 1597, when it was re-taken by

---

[38]Thomas Nashe wrote this passage, entitled "To the Gentlemen Students," in his preface to Robert Greene's play *Menaphon*: "English *Seneca* read by candlelight yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so foorth: and if your intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should lay handfuls of tragical speeches, but ô griefe! *tempus edax rerum*, what's that will last always? The sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance be drie, and *Seneca* let bloud line by line and page by page, at length must needes die to our stage: which makes his famisht followers to imitate Kidde in *Aesop*, who enamored with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation" (*Menaphon Camillas Alarum to Slumbering Euphues* [London: Thomas Orwin and Sampson Clarke, 1589], fol. 3r).

[39]Simpson in her notes provides a short discussion of these lines. She writes: "The reference to 'new playes' is tantalisingly vague. The most notable new play, which appeared in 1597, was Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV,* in which Falstaff made his first appearance on the stage. According to J. Dover Wilson, 'late 1597 is the usually accepted date of the earliest public production of . . . *1 Henry IV* with *2 Henry IV* following shortly after' (*New Cambridge Shakespeare: 1 Henry IV*, 2nd ed., ed. Herbert Weil and Judith Weil [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], pp. xxix–xxx). But if Donne's *Satyre* was written before he started on the expedition in June, it was earlier than the first performance of *1 Henry IV*, and it was also too early for the lost but notorious *Isle of Dogs* by Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson. A popular play in the spring was George Chapman's *An Humourous Day's Mirth*, which E. K. Chambers (*The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. [1923; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967], 3:251) identifies with the comedy of *Humours* produced by the Admiral's men on 1 May 1597."

Henri Quatre. A little later in *Satyre 5* there is a further reference to the theater. Donne is describing the gorgeous attire of the courtiers who flock into the Queen's Presence chamber. Many of them, as he says, have sold part of their estates to buy these fine new clothes, and before long they will be forced to sell part of their wardrobes to the players at the theater:

> As fresh, and sweet their Apparrells be, as bee
> The fields they sold to buy them; For a King
> Those hose are, cry the flatterers; And bring
> Them next weeke to the Theatre to sell;
> Wants reach all states; Me seemes they doe as well
> At stage, as court; All are players; who e'r lookes
> (For themselves dare not goe) o'r Cheapside books,
> Shall finde their wardrops Inventory. . . .
>
> (*Poems*, p. 343)

Two other references in Donne's works are contemporaneous with *Satyre 4*. In the earliest of his prose letters, which have been preserved (written in August 1597 during the enforced delay of the fleet at Plymouth because of storm), Donne writes: "The first act of that play which I sayd I would go over the water to see is done & yet the people hisse. How it will end I know not *ast ego vicissim risero* [but I, in turn, will laugh]."[40] The other reference is to be found in another poem (or verse letter)[41] written during the voyage itself, *The Calme*, in which he thus describes the becalmed shop in which he was sailing:

> And all beauty, and our trimme, decayes,
> Like courts removing, or like ended playes.
>
> (*Poems*, p. 59)

---

[40]One of the letters from the Burley MS, which was printed in Simpson's book *A Study of Prose Works of John Donne*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 303. There she notes that the "MS was burnt, and the transcriber of the only extant copy put 'Cicero' for 'risero'. The quotation is from Horace, *Epode* 15:24, as was pointed out by Dr. Paul Maas."

[41]See Milgate, p. xxxvi.

The same poem contains a line, which is almost certainly a reminiscence of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*:

> Like *BajaZet* encag'd, the sheepheards scoffe,
> Or like slacke sinew'd *Sampson*, his haire off,
> Languish our ships. . . .[42]
>
> (*Poems*, p. 60)

Another letter in the Burley MS, probably written some years later to the Countess of Bedford, has an additional reference to *Tamburlaine*: "The Tyrrany of a suddaine raging sicknes (comfortable in nothing but the violence of itt) assures that either itt or I are short lived . . . I confesse that this is my sicknes worst fitt & as fearefully ominous as Tamerlins last dayes black ensignes whose threatnings none scaped."[43] This is an allusion to Tamburlaine's custom of displaying white ensigns on the first day to signify willingness to accept surrender, red on the second day to denote thirst for blood, and black on the third day to threaten death to all without distinction of sex or age.[44]

---

[42]In her notes Simpson cites Grierson, who writes that this passage is "an echo of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*" (2:137). See Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I* (London: Richard Jhones, 1590), 4.2:

> [Bajezeth is locked in a cage, drawn by "two Moores"]
> Tamburlaine:
> There whiles he lives, shall Bajezeth be kept;
> And where I goe be thus in triumph drawne. . . .

[43]Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works*, pp. 331–332.

[44]Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I*, 4.1:

> Messenger:
> Pleaseth your mightinesse to understand,
> His resolution far exceedeth all:
> The first day when he pitcheth downe his tentes,
> White is their hew, and on his silver crest
> A snowy feather spangled white he beares,
> To signify the mildnesse of his minde.
> That satiate with spoile refuseth blood:
> But when Aurora mounts the second time,
> As red as scarlet is his furniture,
> Then must his kindled wrath bee quencht with blood.
> Not sparing any that can manage armes:

There are other references to the theater in poems by Donne, which belong to the period before his marriage. One, belonging to 1598, was quoted at the opening of this article. Another, a second verse letter addressed to Wotton dating from late summer 1598,[45] also comments on the likeness between Court and stage:

> *To Sir Henry Wotton. "Sir, more than kisses"*
> And Courts are Theaters, where some men play
> Princes, some slaves, all to one end, and of one clay.
> (*Poems*, p. 62)

In a verse letter addressed "To Mr. E. G." (of uncertain date) Donne laments that at the moment London is dull and empty:

> . . . . Here I have beene,
> By staying in London, too much overseene.
> Now pleasure's dearth our City doth posses,
> Our Theatres are fill'd with emptiness. . . .[46]

There is also a possible reference to Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Donne's *An Essay of Valour*, included in a

---

> But if these threats moove not submission.
> Black are his collours, blacke Pavilion,
> His speare, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes,
> And Jetty Feathers menace death and hell,
> Without respect of Sex, degree or age.
> He raceth all his foes with fire and sword.

[45]Pebworth and Summers see this verse letter as the third and last in an exchange between Donne and Wotton that took place in July and August 1598: Donne's "Here's no more newes"; Wotton's "Tis not a coate of gray"; Donne's "Sir, more then kisses" ("Thus Friends Absent Speake," pp. 364–365).

[46]This letter is cited from Grierson, 1:209, and was most probably addressed to Edward Guilpin, the author (in 1598) of *Skialetheia, OR, A Shadowe of Truth, in Certaine Epgirams and Satyres* (Gosse, 1:33). Simpson cites Gosse's explanation that "the reference to closed theatres and abandoned street suggests the plague months from the autumn of 1592 to the close of 1593" (1:82). Thomas Fulton dates this verse letter as having probably been written before *Satyre 3* ("Hamlet's Inky Cloak and Donne's *Satyres*," *John Donne Journal* 20 [2001]: 81).

number of manuscripts with the *Juvenilia* and the *Characters of a Dunce and a Scot*. Its tone is cynical, agreeing with that of the *Satyres* and the letters in prose and verse of the period between 1597 and 1601.[47] In it Donne argues that a soldier is likely to be successful with women, "for a man of Arms is always void of Ceremony, which is the wall that stands between *Pyramus* and *Thisbe*, that is, *Man* and *Woman*."[48] We cannot, however, be certain that this refers to Shakespeare's play, for Donne might have been thinking of Book Four of *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, from which, though the mechanism of Arthur Golding's translation, Shakespeare derived the story.[49] Nevertheless, the bantering tone of Donne's allusion suits the farcical spirit of Bottom's play better than the serious, even tragic, style of Ovid's story.

Period After Donne's Marriage (1602–1614)

After Donne's marriage and imprisonment, and his subsequent retirement with his wife first to Pyrford and then to Mitcham, his references to the theater, apart from the great tribute to *Volpone* (that has been previously quoted), became much fewer.[50] Yet one important

[47]Pebworth confirms this dating, explaining that: "'An Essay of Valour', probably written in the late 1590's, may reflect Donne's service in two of the Earl of Essex's expeditions. Written in the manner of Montaigne, it consists of arguments proving 'that nothinge is so potent eyther to procure, or merit Love, as Valour'. It was first published in the 11th edition of Sir Thomas Overbury's *A Wife* (1622)" ("Donne, John," in *Encylopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier [London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997], p. 226).

[48]John Donne, *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters* (London: T. N. and Humphrey Mosely, 1652), p. 74.

[49]These lines read: "The wall that parted howse from howse had ryven therein a crany / Which shronke at making of the wall, this fault not markt of any / Of many hundred yeares before, (what dooth not love espye).) / These lovers first of all found out, and made away whereby / too talke toogether secretly, and through the same dyd go / their loving whisperings very light and safelye too and fro" (Golding, trans., *The Fyrst Fower Bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos Worke, Intitled Metamorphosis* [London: Willyam Seres, 1565], fol. 2r).

[50]One interesting reference to the theater, not noted by Simpson, is the last fictional book to be listed in Donne's *The Courtier's Library* (dated between 1601–1610), which reads: "Tarltonus de Privilegiis Parliamenti" [Tarlton. *On*

reference can be found in *Problem 17*,[51] which contains what appears to be a clear reference to Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The title is "Why are statesmen most incredulous [incredible]?"[52] and the problem opens thus:

> Are they all wise enough to follow their excellent Pattern *Tiberius*, who brought the senate to be diligent and industrious to believe him, were it never so opposite or diamtericall, that it destroyed their very ends to be believed, as *Asinius Gallus* had almost deceived this man by believing him, and the Major [Mayor] and Alderman of *London* in *Richard* the Third?"[53]

This incident occurs in 3.7 of *Richard III*, when the Mayor and a number of the citizens enter to offer Richard the crown. They are urged on by Buckingham and Catesby, but Richard appears "aloft, between two Bishops" and pretends absorption in his religious duties, and a desire to

---

the Privileges of Parliament]. This relates to the contemporary actor and clown, Richard Tarlton; as Victor Harris notes: "Actors, though often personally popular, were of course long without status in the society" ("John Donne and the Theatre," *Philological Quarterly* 41 [1962]: 263, note 34). The entry is dated in and cited from Piers Brown, "'Hac ex consilio meo via progredieris': Courtly Reading and Secretarial Mediation in Donne's *The Courtier's Library*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (2008): 833–866.

[51]In her essay Simpson includes the discussion of *Problem 17* in the period between 1591–1601, accepting its earlier dating as set out by Donne's son (see "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters*: "Here then you have the entertainment of the Authors Youth," [n. p.]). Michael W. Price, however, provides a recent summary of the scholarship, which confirms that it more probably dates from the period between 1603–1610 ("Recovering Donne's Critique of the *Arcana Imperii* in the *Problems*," *Studies in Philology* 101 [2004]: 332–355).

[52]This alternative wording is cited by Simpson in her two discussions of the manuscripts of the *Paradoxes* and *Problems*. See the essays by Evelyn M. Simpson, "Two Manuscripts of Donne's *Paradoxes* and *Problems*," *Review of English Studies* 3 (1927): 135; "More Manuscripts of Donne's *Paradoxes* and *Problems*," *Review of English Studies*, 10 (1934): 290.

[53]Donne, *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters*, p. 62.

avoid the cares of a state.[54] The Mayor and citizens appear to be convinced by Richard's refusal. Buckingham upbraids him, and goes out with the citizens. Richard is obliged to call them back again, for their acceptance of his refusal threatens to wreck his scheme. As the text appears in *Paradoxes, Problemes*, the phrase "in *Richard* the Third" clearly indicates the play. It should be noted, however, that most of the MSS omit "in," so that the sentence with this omission means that the Mayor and Alderman "almost deceived" Richard by believing him.

Donne could, however, no longer be a regular theatergoer, but on his visits to London he seems to have gotten into touch with Ben Jonson and the choice spirits who assembled with him at the Mermaid Tavern. We do not know exactly when his friendship with Jonson began, there is no evidence to show that it started before 1602–1603.[55] While Donne was the rising young secretary of Egerton, familiar with the Court and having apparently a brilliant future before him, it was unlikely that he would have any contact with the turbulent young actor and playwright, who involved himself in one trouble after another with the authorities. Jonson's career had opened inauspiciously with the botching up of old plays and the production of some immature comedies of which he was later ashamed. In 1595 he was involved in a duel, in which he killed fellow actor Gabriel Spencer; for this he was brought to trial, and escaped execution for murder only by pleading benefit of clergy, and

---

[54]In the first published edition this passage reads:

Enter Rich. With two bishops a lofte.
Majer.
See where he stands between two clergie men.
Buckingham.
Two props of vertue for a christain Prince,
To staie him from the fall of vanitie,
Famous Plantaganet, most gracious prince,
Lend favorable eares to our request,
And pardon us the interruption
Of thy devotion and right Christian zeale.

(Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* [London: Valentine Simmes, Peter Short, and Andrew Wise, 1597]).

[55]For a more recent discussion of Donne and Jonson, see William F. Blissett, "'The Strangest Pageant, Fashion'd Like a Court': John Donne and Ben Jonson to 1600—Parallel Lives," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 7 (2001): 8.1–51.

reading his neck-verse.[56] Subsequently, in 1597 he was imprisoned for his share with Thomas Nashe in the writing of the satirical play *Isle of Dogs*, while in 1600–1602 he was engaged in a series of conflicts with John Marston, Thomas Dekker and others in the famous *Poetomachina* or *Stage Quarrel*. Early in the reign of James I he came into favor at Court as a writer of masques and entertainments, while he continued at intervals to write plays for the popular stage, of which *Volpone*, *The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* are the most famous. In the commendatory verses, which Donne prefixed to the quarto edition of *Volpone* in 1607, we find the friendship between Donne and Jonson firmly established on a basis of mutual esteem. In these lines Donne has completely abandoned the attitude of supercilious superiority, which as a law-student at Lincoln's Inn, he had shown in *Satyre 2*. Instead of jeers at "labour'd sceanes" and "ideot actors" he expresses the profound admiration that he feels for this master-playwright who has followed the ancients in order to equal and even surpass them, writing in praise of Jonson: "Priscis, ingenium facit, labórque / Te parem" [Genius and toil put you on a level with the ancients].[57]

The friendship between the two men is attested to by the lines that Jonson addressed to Donne in his *Epigrammes*:

> *32. To John Donne*
> Donne, the delight of PHOEBUS, and each *Muse*,
> Who, to thy one, all other braines refuse;
> Whose every worke, of thy most earely wit,
> Came forth example, and remaines so, yet;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *96. To John Donne*
> Who shall doubt, DONNE, where I a *Poet* bee,
> When I dare send my *Epigrammes* to thee?[58]

---

[56]Chambers, 3:353.

[57]The Latin original and the English translation are cited from Dennis Flynn's essay, "Donne's *'Amicissimo, et Meritissimo* Ben: Jonson' and the Daring of *Volpone*," *Literary Imagination* 6 (2004): 368.

[58]*Ben Jonson*, 8:34 and 62.

It was also Jonson who sent a copy of Donne's *Satyres* to the Countess of Bedford, prefacing it with an epigram (94), in which he writes:

> . . . Rare poemes aske rare friends.
> Yet, *Satyres*, since the most of mankind bee
> Their un-avoided subject, fewest see:[59]

What is more, in the "*Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond*," the latter (a Scottish poet and philosopher) records that "he (Jonson) esteemeth John Done the first poet in the world in some things" and also that "he hath commented and translated Horace Art of Poesie, it is in Dialogue wayes by Criticus he understandeth Dr. Done."[60] Since Horace's treatise devotes a considerable amount of space to the drama, it is probable that if Jonson's dialogue had survived,[61] as his translation has done, so we should have learnt from the speeches assigned to Criticus a fair statement of Donne's views on the nature of tragedy and comedy.

During these years Donne and Jonson were both in the circle of literary men, which moved around the brilliant Countess of Bedford. She acted in some of the masques, which Jonson wrote for performance at Court, and it is in connection with her appearances that Donne incidentally mentions these masques. In a letter to his friend "Sir T[homas R[oe]," he writes "deliver this Letter to your Lady, now, or when the rage of the Mask is past." This letter is dated "Micham, *the last of 1607, as I remember*."[62] Since it opens thus: "I Have bespoke you a New-years-gift, that is, a good New year," it must have been written on 31 December 1607, and not, as Gosse argues, on 24 March 1608. Gosse proceeds to argue that the masque "must have been Ben Jonson's *The Hue and Cry after Cupid*, prepared at Court for Lord Haddington's marriage with Lady Elizabeth."[63] If, however, the letter was written on 31 December 1607, the masque must have been Jonson's *Masque of Beauty*, which was performed at Court on 10 January 1608. There is also an

---

[59]*Ben Jonson*, 8:60.

[60]*Ben Jonson*, 1:35 and 144.

[61]As Simpson notes, it was lost apparently in the fire, which destroyed so many of Jonson's manuscripts.

[62]Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London: J. Flesher and Richard Marriot, 1651), p. 204.

[63]Gosse, 1:182.

additional reference to a masque, which was probably Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, in a letter Donne wrote to Sir H[enry] G[oodyer]: "The King is gone this day for *Royston*: and hath left with the Queen a commandment to meditate upon a Masque for Christmas, so that they grow serious about that already."[64]

In view of Donne's continued friendship with Jonson it seems permissible to suggest that two lines in *The Second Anniversary* may contain a reference to Jonson's *Catiline*:

> How others on our stage their parts did Act;
> What *Cæsar* did, yea, and what *Cicero* said. . . .
> (*Poems*, p. 269)

Catiline his Conspiracy, acted by the King's men in 1611, was a failure on the stage and was published in quarto by Jonson later in 1611. *The Second Anniversary* was written according to Grierson "in France in 1612, at some time prior to the 14th of April."[65] "What *Cicero* said" proved to be the ruin of the play: "The first two acts went well, the third was tolerated, but the long oration of Cicero in the fourth provoked the impatience of the pit, and the play was damned."[66] Caesar has a considerable part in the play. Donne was in England up to November 1611, when he traveled to France with Sir Robert and Lady Drury. Thus he may have seen the unlucky performance of *Catiline* earlier in the year, or he may have read the play when the quarto edition appeared. We are not obliged to accept this conjecture, for the conjunction of Caesar and Cicero is a natural one to a man familiar with Roman history. It is the fact that *The Second Anniversary* was written so soon after the appearance of the play, which suggests that Donne, who had so much admired his friend's *Volpone*, may also have been interested by *Catiline*, which, in

---

[64]Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 143–144. The letter was written in November 1608. As Simpson notes, Jonson's *Masque of Queens* was performed at Whitehall 2 February 1609.

[65]Grierson, 2:187. For a recent, comprehensive discussion of the dating of this poem, see "Dating and Early Printings," in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 6: The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*, ed. Paul A. Parrish, Donald R. Dickson, and Dennis Flynn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 281–284.

[66]*Ben Jonson*, 2:113.

spite of its failure on the stage, contains much fine verse and several good scenes.

Period After Donne's Ordination (1615–1631)

After Donne's ordination his references to the stage are generally incidental, in order to provide him with an image. He opens one of his *Holy Sonnets* with the words "This is my playes last scene" (*Poems* 33).[67] He thinks of the whole world as a theater, in which one can discover God. He writes in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:12 (13 April 1628):

> This way, our Theatre, where we sit to see God, is the whole frame of nature. . . . The whole frame of the world is the Theatre, and every creature the stage, the *medium*, the glasse in which we may see God.
>
> (*Sermons*, 8:223–224)

Or again, in his sermon on Proverbs 22:11 (24 March 1617), he asks:

> Hath God made this World his Theatre, *ut exhibeatur ludus deorum,* that man may represent God in his conversation; and wilt thou play no part? But think that thou only wast made to pass thy time merrily, and to be the only spectator upon this Theatre?
>
> (*Sermons*, 1:207)

Much more vivid is the following passage, from his sermon on Acts 28:6 (25 January 1629), in which he writes:

---

[67]Simpson follows Grierson's dating of the *Holy Sonnets* in the years "after the death of Donne's wife in 1617" (2:225). A more updated discussion states that the "after examining the evidence anew and sifting the arguments of prior editors, we are left with little upon which to base a theory about when the majority of the Holy Sonnets were written" ("The Dates of the Holy Sonnets and their Relationship to Other Poems," in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 7, Part I: The Holy Sonnets,* ed. Paul A. Parrish, Helen B. Brooks, Robert T. Fallon, and P. G. Stanwood [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005], p. C).

> If I should aske thee at a Tragedy, where thou shouldest see him that had drawne blood, lie weltring, and surrounded in his owne blood, Is there a God now? If thou couldest answer me, No, These are but Inventions, and Representations of men, and I beleeve a God never the more for this.
>
> (*Sermons*, 8:332)

This description is sufficiently vivid to make us sure that Donne had some particular tragedy in mind. We have seen that Marlowe, Shakespeare and Jonson are the three dramatists to whose plays Donne makes specific allusion. The description here would not fit any of Marlowe's plays, for Tamburlaine dies of sickness, the Jew of Malta falls into a boiling cauldron, Faustus was torn to pieces off the stage and Edward the Second was not a murderer. Neither does it fit Jonson's two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. It agrees well with *Richard III*, a play that Donne knew, whereas it does not suit Macbeth, who is killed off-stage and whose head is brought in by Macduff. There are other playwrights such as John Webster, of whom Donne might perhaps have been thinking. The description would fit the death of Flamineo in the last scene of the revenge tragedy *The White Devil* (1612)[68] and several other Jacobean tragedies might be instanced.

---

[68]Webster, *The White Divel* (London: Nicholas Okes and Thomas Archer, 1612):

> *Flamineo*
> Oh, what blade ist?
> A Toledo, or an English Fox.
> I ever thought a Cutler should distinguish
> The cause of my death, rather than a Doctor.
> Search my wound deeper: tent it with the steele that made it.
> . . . . . .
> My life was a black charnell: I have cought
> An everlasting could. I have lost my voice
> Most irrecoverably. Farewell, glorious villaines.
> "This busie trade of life appeares most vaine,
> Since rest breeds rest, where all seeke paine by paine."
> Let no harsh flattering Bels resound my knell,
> Strike, thunder, and strike lowde, to my farewell! [Dyes.]

There are also sermons in which the theater is used to censure human behavior. In a sermon preached on Job 36:25 (25 August 1622), Donne asks a rhetorical question:

> How many times go we to Comedies, to Masques, to places of great and noble resort, nay even to Church onely to see the company? If I had no other errand to heaven, but the *communion of Saints*, the fellowship of the faithful . . . to see this *Communion of Saints*, this fellowship of the faithfull, is worth all the paynes, that the sight costs us in this world.
>
> (*Sermons*, 4:176–177)

Preaching again in his sermon on 2 Corinthians 1:3 (Trinity Term 1621) of the man who seeks false comfort from the world instead of true comfort from God, Donne says:

> Because I am drousie, I will be kept awake, with the obscenities and scurrilities of a Comedy, or the drums and ejulations of a Tragedy: I will smother and suffocate sorrow, with hill upon hill, course after course at a voluptuous feast, and drown sorrow in excesse of Wine, and call that sickness, health; and all this is no comfort, for *God is the God of all comfort*, and this is not of God.
>
> (*Sermons*, 3:272)

Lastly, in a sermon on the Penitential Psalm 6:1,[69] Donne speaks more guardedly and makes the point that such recreations as music, mirth and

[69]The sermon series on the Penitential Psalm 6 was possibly preached at Lincoln's Inn during the Lenten seasons (1616–1621) and re-preached in parochial situations. Paul Stanwood argues for the earlier dating while the emphasis on the parochial (re-)preaching is a recent decision made by the editors of the forthcoming *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne*. The particular discussion of these sermons will appear in volume 9, "Parochial Sermons: St. Dunstan's-in-the-West," ed. Arnold Hunt. See also Paul Stanwood, "Donne's Earliest Sermons and the Penitential Tradition," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway: University of Central Arkansas Press, 1995), pp. 366–379.

comedies are not unlawful in themselves, but should not be used as methods of escape for the sin-stricken conscience:

> If he [David] *fled to Sin, to Heaven, to Hell* [Psalm 139:8–9], he was sure to meet *God there*; and there thou shalt meet him too, if thou fly from God, to the reliefe of outward comforts, of musicke, of mirth, of drinke, of cordialls, of Comedies, of conversation. Not that such recreations are unlawfull; the minde hath her physick as well as the body, but when thy sadnesse proceeds from a sense of they sinnes, (which is Gods key to the doore of his mercy, put into thy hand) it is a new, and a greater sin, to goe about to overcome that holy sadnesse, with these prophane diversions.
>
> (*Sermons*, 5:321)

After considering all this evidence of the deep impression made on Donne's mind by his early play-going, is it fanciful to detect a reminiscence of the final tragic scene of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* in the macabre picture with which Donne closes the sermon, which he preached before King Charles (1 April 1627)? His text, from Mark 4:24, had been "take heed what ye hear," and after he had applied it to the hearing of God's voice in the Scriptures and the Church, and the hearing of men's flattery and slanders, he applied it to the hearing and discerning of the devil's voice when he leads men into temptation. Finally, he depicts a sinner tormented on his death-bed by the voice of the devil tempting him to despair:

> But then, *Cavete*, take heed what you heare from him [the devil] too, especially then, when he speakes to thee upon thy death-bed, at thy last transmigration . . . then when thou shalt heare a hollow voice in thy selfe, upbraiding thee, that thou hast violated all thy Makers laws, worn out all they Saviours merits, frustrated all the endeavors of his blessed Spirit upon thee, evacuated all thine own Repentances, with relapses; then when thou shalt see, or seem to see his hand turning the streame of thy Saviours bloud into another channell, and telling thee, here's enough for *Jew* and *Turke*, but not a drop for thee.
>
> (*Sermons,* 7:413)

This reminds at least one reader of the cries of the dying Faustus at the play's end:

> See where Christs bloud streames in the firmament,
> One drop of bloud will save me: Oh my Christ,
> Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ,
> Yet will I call on him: Oh spare me Lucifer.[70]

But the sinner whom Donne has in mind here, as the context shows, is no lost soul condemned to damnation, but a repentant Christian (it may be John Donne himself), and others prone like him to this particular temptation to despair. In a more hopeful vein he continues, in same sermon on Mark 4:24:

> Take heed what you heare; and be but able to say to Satan then, as Christ said to *Peter*, in his name, *Vade retro Satan, come after me Satan*, come after me *to morrow*; come a minute after my soule is departed from this body, come to me, where I shall be then, and when thou seest me washed in the bloud of my Saviour, clothed in the righteousnesse of my Saviour, lodged in the bosome of my Saviour, crowned with the merits of my Saviour, confesse, that upon my death-bed, thou wast a lyer, and wouldest have been a murderer, and the Lord shall, and I, in him, shall rebuke thee."
>
> (*Sermons*, 7:413)

Conclusion

If this is dismissed, as it may be, as mere conjecture, we have plenty of solid evidence without it to show that the Donne of the *Holy Sonnets* and of the *Sermons* continued to draw on the rich store of theatrical imagery, which he had earlier accumulated. So sensitive a mind and so keen an intelligence could not have watched the masterpieces of Marlowe, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson without receiving an indelible impression. Donne the poet and Donne the preacher bear witness to the plays, which Donne the law-student had watched in his brilliant youth.

---

[70]Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (London: John Wright, 1624), n. p.