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"no power, no will, no sense": The End of Motion in Donne's "The Storme" and "The Calme"

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In September 1608, Donne wrote a letter to his friend Sir Henry Goodere in which he complained of feelings of futility and a longing for death. Written during the prolonged period of political and social exile which followed his marriage to Anne More, Donne expresses the frustration of inactivity, of a lack of employment and purpose:

> I would not that death should take me asleep. I would not have him merely seize me and only declare me to be dead, but win me and overcome me. When I must shipwreck, I would do it in a sea, where mine own impotency might have some excuse, not in a sullen, weedy lake, where I could not have so much as exercise for my swimming. Therefore, I would fain do something, but that I cannot tell what is no wonder. For to choose is to do, but to be no part of any body is to be nothing.[1]

What this passage tells us, as John Carey notes, is that Donne sought activity, not only in life, but also at the moment of death.[2] By envisioning a struggle with death, he wished to banish the passivity of expiration and make for himself a death that mirrored the movements of life. According

[1]Donne, Letter 25, in *John Donne: Selected Letters*, ed. Paul M. Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 35.

[2]Carey devotes a chapter to Donne's obsession with an animated death in *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), pp. 198–231.

to Carey, "the dead and the dying are," for Donne, "more spectacularly alive than the living."[3] He, therefore, imagines Donne as drawn to death as something more vital, or more real than life. But Donne's active impressions of death, his animated metaphors, are derived precisely from the movements of lived experience, the reality of the being he wishes to preserve from nothingness. It is life that Donne projects onto the occasion of death, and in this instance, the image of water, of the turmoil of the sea and the stillness of a lake, encapsulates the disparities between motion as a form of permanence and rest as annihilation.

The image of shipwreck and a struggle at sea, although commonplace in his writing, is one with which Donne had a particular affinity, having suffered the perils of adverse weather on his youthful voyage to the Azores in the company of Essex and Ralegh in 1597. Elsewhere, Donne employs navigational metaphors to account for a wide range of physical and spiritual experience. As Milton Rugoff notes, for nearly "every difficulty of life" he appears to have found a "vivid counterpart in the experience of the seafarer."[4] Whether Donne had the Azores voyage in mind when composing his letter to Goodere cannot be certain, but the conditions of motion and rest, of activity and purpose, of being and non-being, and of storm and calm are identifiable as common themes which bind this text to Donne's two earlier verse letters, "The Storme" and "The Calme," which recorded the expedition. This paper is about Donne's experience of sea travel. It suggests that the themes of movement and rest, the driving forces behind his maritime imagery, are conditioned not only by the visceral experience of travel by sea, but also by classical and contemporary understandings of space and motion. By examining "The Storme" and "The Calme" alongside other instances of navigational metaphor, I argue that Donne's Aristotelian conception of movement as purpose (and therefore life) is undermined as he becomes exposed to the spatial extremes of the Atlantic, the randomness of motion, the dislocation of extended space, and the stagnation of rest.

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[3]Carey, p. 204.

[4]Rugoff, *Donne's Imagery: A Study in Creative Sources* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 130.

In 1596 Donne joined the Earl of Essex's successful raid on the Spanish port of Cadiz, as a volunteer. Perhaps encouraged by the success of this action, he participated the following year in the disastrous Azores expedition, in which the fleet was beset by a storm almost immediately after leaving Plymouth, and then later becalmed near the Azores. Both of these experiences were recounted by Donne in the verse letters addressed to his friend Sir Christopher Brook, and adapted, as Anthony Parr notes, with some poetic license, to present the storm and calm as occurring sequentially.[5] Previous criticism of the poems has generally conformed to the idea that there is a certain artificiality about their representation of events. Parr, for example, finds in them a "quasi-mannerist" tendency which obscures "conventional descriptive purposes."[6] He therefore prefers to identify them as comments on contemporary politics. Similarly, B. F. Nellist argues that they lack realism, that they "present the reader with few clear visual details, and no account of the size or shape or colour of things."[7] Clayton D. Lein goes further than Nellist in finding the particular classical precedents from which Donne borrowed. He argues that the works of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Seneca provided models for almost all of "The Storme's" metaphors, leaving little room for original descriptive imagery.[8]

What Nellist suggests, along with the later analysis of Lein, is that the poems participate in the long tradition, inherited from classical literature, of imagining the sea, with its storms and calms, dispassionately in terms of the ruling power of fortune. For Nellist the sea is "the type for all earthly instability."[9] Both are correct in their observations that the poems register the "passions aroused by participation in the situation."[10] But by removing Donne from the actual experience of the voyage, Nellist and Lein overlook the importance of sensory perception to the poems' meanings. In addition, while their borrowings from the sea tropes of

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[5]Parr, "John Donne, Travel Writer," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.1 (2007): 61–85, quotation from p. 71.

[6]Parr, p. 70.

[7]Nellist, "Donne's 'Storm' and 'Calm' and the Descriptive Tradition," *Modern Language Review* 59 (1964): 511–515, quotation from p. 511.

[8]Lein, "Donne's 'The Storme': The Poem and the Tradition," *English Literary Renaissance* 4.1 (1974): 137–163.

[9]Nellist, p. 511.

[10]Nellist, p. 513.

classical literature are without question, the poems are also immersed, as with much of Donne's work, in contemporary ideas about the natural world. The suggestion that the verse letters are derived solely from classical sources overlooks their distinctly Atlantic setting and context, with which ancient mariners would have had little experience.

As Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers argue, the genre of the verse letter is "fundamentally referential and occasional," and "necessarily rooted in external reality. Hence, full appreciation of any particular verse letter requires knowledge of the contexts from which it arises."[11] Nellist's remark that "we seem isolated in some strange world" cut off from time and space "with only the elements for company,"[12] therefore, seems self-defeating when we consider that not only are the poems contextually specific, but these are also the exact physical details which Donne has no choice but to record in the undifferentiated spaces of ocean and sky. In suggesting that both poems record an actual physical, as well as psychological experience, what follows builds upon Linda Mizejewski's analysis of the poems as meditations on the cosmological shift from old to new philosophy.[13] Mizejewski demonstrates that, in "The Storme," Donne introduces a world of harmonious correspondences, of macrocosm and microcosm, only to tear them down as elemental forces reduce old certainties to doubt in "The Calme." But in charting the disorientating effects of a shift in cosmological space, she disregards the centrality of motion and rest to the poem's and the period's spatial understandings.

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"The Storme" opens, as Mizejewski suggests, with stable accounts of the universal connections between a finite cosmos, the world, and man. "England, to whom we'owe, what we be, and have, / Sad that her sonnes did seeke a forraine grave," Donne writes,

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[11]Pebworth and Summers, "'Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton," *Modern Philology* 81.4 (1984): 361–377, quotation from p. 361.

[12]Nellist, p. 511.

[13]Mizejewski, "Darkness and Disproportion: A Study of Donne's 'Storme' and 'Calme,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 76.2 (1977): 217–230.

> From out her pregnant intrailes sigh'd a winde
> Which at th'ayres middle marble roome did finde
> Such strong resistance, that it selfe it threw
> Downeward againe; and so when it did view
> How in the port, our fleet deare time did leese,
> Withering like prisoners, which lye but for fees,
> Mildly it kist our sailes, and, fresh, and sweet
> As, to a stomack sterv'd, whose insides meete,
> Meate comes, it came; and swole our sailes. . . .[14]

In this passage, the natural movements of the earth are framed in biological terms, mirroring those of man, and therefore identifying man as the microcosmic center of the finite universe. It envisions a harmonious co-operation between the concentric spaces of Earth, England, the ships, and their occupants. Donne here conforms to the standard Aristotelian/Ptolemaic conception of space. But this is also the Aristotelian world of motion. For example, Donne's description of the origins and movement of the wind as "sighing" out from the landmass of England is derived from Aristotle's *Meteorology*. As Aristotle put it, wind was "a body of dry exhalation moving about the earth," which was caused by the heat of the sun.[15] As the natural inclination of hot air is to rise, this exhalation moved upwards only to be met with the cold middle region of air, which contained clouds, rain, snow, and hail, or as Donne terms it, "th'ayres middle marble room" (14). Rebounding against this region, it was thrust down again and flowed horizontally, following the circular motion of the celestial sphere. Aristotle's theory on the winds, therefore, accorded with his law of natural motion, which posited that the four elements, from which all things were derived, moved towards their natural place. So, for example, air rises and earth falls unless met with resistance.

The eventual movement of Donne's ship is similarly expressed in terms of Aristotle's model, in this case, his conception of forced motion.

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[14]Donne, "The Storme," in *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1967), lines 9–10, 13–21. Except where otherwise indicated, all quotations of Donne's verse are from this edition.

[15]Aristotle, quoted in Liba Chaia Taub, *Ancient Meteorology* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 90.

Contrary to what we now recognize as inertial movement, which is the continual motion of matter unless physically obstructed, for Aristotle, a body could only move if pushed or pulled. Donne's immobilized fleet "leasing time" in the port can, therefore, only be set in motion by the impelling "kiss" of the wind, just as it eventually stops four lines later as the wind disappears, like English "countrimen, / Which bring friends one dayes way" (23–24) only to return home. The act of motion was regarded by Aristotle as a principle constituent of his cosmology, and the process by which things could achieve their final potential. "The nature of a thing," he writes, "is its end and its purpose."[16] Donne's sense of motion, at this early stage of the poem, is, in this respect, Aristotelian. In his later elegy, "Loues Progresse," Donne returned to this idea when he wrote:

> Who ever loues, if hee doe not propose
> The right true end of loue; Hee's one which goes
> To sea, for nothing, but to make him sick.[17]

The twin activities of love and sea voyaging must be undertaken, as Aristotle defines movement, to some definite "right true end." In "Confined Love," Donne conceals a bawdy conceit within a similar call to action: "Who'e'r rigg'd faire ship to lie in harbors, / And not to seeke new lands, or not to deale withall?" (15–16). The penetrative imagery of ship and harbor is, for Donne, a motion which should be carried out in a multitude of ports. This attraction to purposeful movement, however, was something that he took seriously, as we can see from his use of an almost identical metaphor in the sermon of 1619 before his departure for Germany: "We see ships in the river . . . but all their use is gone, if they go not to sea."[18]

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[16]Aristotle, "The Scope of Natural Science," book 2, part 2 of *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 37.

[17]Donne, "Loues Progresse," in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 2: The Elegies*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), lines 1–3. All further quotations from Donne's *Elegies* are taken from this edition.

[18]Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–1962), 2:246.

In "The Storme," Donne's restlessness and desire for movement are palpable in the static "withering prisons" that the ships have become. So that when the wind does finally arrive, it is with a sense of release and then fulfilment as the sails are swollen to resemble a well-fed stomach. The next line in which the sailors react with joy "as *Sara*'her swelling . . . to see" (22), borrows from the Genesis story the forlorn hope of child-bearing now realized. But it also carries the suggestion of expectation and purpose, the sense of purpose that Donne shared with his fellow gentleman volunteers. The world with which Donne initially presents us, then, is one of order, in which both man and nature correspond spatially, and move towards an ideal of fulfilment. It is at this point in the poem, however, that the old cosmological assumptions begin to unravel. As the storm sets in, Donne loses his sense of sight, hearing, and spatial perspective: "when I wakt, I saw, that I saw not," Donne writes,

> I, and the Sunne, which should teach mee'had forgot
> East, West, day, night, and I could onely say,
> If the world had lasted, now it had beene day.
> Thousands our noyses were, yet wee 'mongst all
> Could none by his right name, but thunder call:
> Lightning was all our light, and it rain'd more
> Then if the Sunne had drunke the sea before. . . .
> (37–44)

These lines register the particular spatial and temporal problems of navigating the Atlantic in the period before the solution to the problem of longitude. In order to calculate the ship's position, mariners had to have recourse to fixed points, often relying on eclipses, the Pole Star, or, as Donne notes, the sun. But as "The Storme" makes clear, sailors were at the mercy of the elements, which could disorient ships and obscure the fixed stars by which they sailed. Without points of reference, both time and place become incalculable.

Antonis Balasopoulus argues that the ocean, in this period, was the "world's most massive and politically consequential image of a nonplace," since it lay "simultaneously within the planetary imaginary and out-side

the bounds" of the known earth.[19] The dislocating experience of sailing the Atlantic, therefore, owed much to the connections between geography and astronomy. Not only were they conceptually aligned as spatially extended regions, but also to understand ocean space itself required knowledge of the heavens, which, until the new astronomy proved otherwise, were believed to be regular and fixed. For Aristotle, in a finite universe ships could symbolize emplacement. In his *Physics*, he employed the image of a ship in a river as a means of demonstrating the order of a universe, organized according to immovable boundaries:

> when something is in motion inside a moving object (imagine a ship on a river), the container functions as a vessel rather than as a place. Given that place is meant to be immovable, the whole river is really the place for the ship, because taken as a whole the river is immovable. And so place is the nearest unmoved limit of the container.[20]

In other words, the mariner is contained by the ship, the ship by the river, and the river by the riverbed. The implication here is that the riverbed itself is relative to the earth and, therefore, hierarchically connected to the outermost limit of the universe. In this context the ship, although moveable, becomes an exemplar of universal stability. With the onset of the new philosophy, however, Aristotle's ship image is adapted to suggest the opposite. The two most important developments of the new science were the suggestion of inertial movement, first touched upon by Galileo, and the proposition of infinite space, which followed the discovery of new stars and planets. In the wake of these discoveries, Rene Descartes, for example, revisited the scientific conundrum of a ship's location relative to fixed points in the universe. "If we believe the earth moves," Descartes writes,

> and suppose that it advances the ship the same distance from west to east as the ship travels from east to west in the

[19]Balasopoulus, "'Suffer a Sea Change': Spatial Crisis, Maritime Modernity, and the Politics of Utopia," *Cultural Critique* 63 (2006): 123–156, quotation from p. 131.

[20]Aristotle, "The world as a whole is not in a place," book 4, part 5 of *Physics*, p. 88.

> corresponding period of time, we shall again say that the man sitting on the stern is not changing place; for we are now determining the place by means of certain fixed points in the heavens. Finally, if we suppose that there are no such genuinely fixed points to be found in the universe . . . we shall conclude that nothing has a permanent place, except as determined by our thought.[21]

The suggestion that nothing has a permanent place has profound implications for a sailor set adrift on the middle of the ocean. His ship is subsumed in a process of perpetual flux in boundless space. For Donne, the conditions of the storm reduce the ship to a state of sickness and decay which pre-figures his image of the world in *The First Anniversary*. He observes that the mast is shaken with an "ague, and the Hold and Wast / With a salt dropsie clog'd, and all our tacklings / Snapping, like too-high-stretched treble strings" (54–56). Where once the ship was defined as a stable space in the hierarchy of correspondences, it is now out of tune with the universe.

Anthony Low argues that, in *The Second Anniuersarie*, Donne anticipates the law of inertia in his image of a ship continuing to move once the wind has ceased to blow its sails.[22] Donne writes:

> But as a ship which hath strooke saile, doth runne,
> By force of that force which before, it wonne,
> Or as sometimes in a beheaded man,
> Though at those two Red seas, which freely ran,
> One from the Trunke, another from the Head,
> His soule be saild, to her eternall bed,
> His eies will twinckle, and his tongue will roll,
> As though he beckned, and cal'd backe his Soul. . . .[23]

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[21]Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 288.

[22]Low, "'The 'Turning Wheele': Carew, Jonson, Donne [and the First] Law of Motion," *John Donne Journal* 1.1–2 (1982): 69–80.

[23]Donne, *The Second Anniuersarie*, in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 6: The Anniveraries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,

For Low, the concurrent metaphor of a man continuing to think following his beheading, suggests that Donne saw this momentum as a sign of the world's death. In fact, his description of the ship's movement as impelled by "force of that force which before, it wonne," bears a much closer resemblance to Jean Buridan's theory of impetus, in its suggestions of a protracted motion towards a final stop—in this case death. "When a mover sets a body in motion," Buridan wrote,

> he implants into it a certain impetus, that is, a certain force enabling a body to move in the direction in which the mover starts it, be it upwards, downwards, sidewards, or in a circle. The implanted impetus increases in the same ratio as the velocity. It is because of this impetus that a stone moves on after the thrower has ceased moving it.[24]

In other words, Donne's ship might move by virtue of an initial gust of wind, but, as Buridan notes, the resistance of air and gravity will eventually bring it to a halt.

This is also true of "The Storme" and "The Calme," in which there are no suggestions that Donne foresees inertial movement. On the contrary, the withdrawal of the wind and accumulation of water resistance in the "The Calme" leads the fleet to its condition of tortured stasis. The theory of impetus was a modification, rather than a refutation, of the Aristotelian position. Buridan agreed with Aristotle, insomuch as impetus was believed to be an external (rather than internal) force which imbued an object with a certain momentum, setting it in motion towards a definite end; the "*mover* sets a body in motion." In this respect, both Aristotle and Buridan are bound to the teleological notion of purposeful ends. But in "The Storme" and "The Calme," it is this sense of purpose, so central to Aristotle's physics and ethics, which Donne finds lacking in both human nature and the physical world. For Donne, the ocean exists beyond the rules of classical physics.

Elsewhere in his writing, when the possibility of movement is withdrawn, ocean space assumes a negative aspect. For example, in *Satyre*

1995), lines 7–14. All further quotations from Donne's *Second Anniuersarie* are taken from this edition.

[24]Buridan, quoted in Olaf Pederson, *Early Physics and Astronomy: A Historical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 210.

III, echoing "The Storme's" earlier image of sailors "coffin'd" in their cabins, Donne asks:

> Dar'st thou ayd mutinous Dutch, and dar'st thou lay
> Thee in ships wooden Sepulchres, a prey
> To leaders rage, to stormes, to shot, to dearth?
> (17–19)

Here, death, as the ultimate "rest," takes place, paradoxically, on a moving ship. In both cases, this metaphorical death is caused by the withdrawal of active agency, either through the chance of storms, subjection to the whims of naval commanders, or bombardment by enemies at sea. Stillness, to "lay" passively as "prey" to active forces is what Donne seeks to avoid. Similarly, in "Love's War" the ship is cast as a prison:

> To mew me in a Ship, is to enthrall
> Me in a prison, that weare like to fall,
> Or in a Cloyster; save that ther men dwell
> In a calme heauen, here in a swaggering hell.
> Long Voyages are long consumptions
> And Ships are carts for executions.
> (21–26)

The shipboard scenario imagined here is one of confinement in a vessel which is likely to "fall," either to an enemy or to the elements. In other words, individual will, as with *Satyre III*, is at the mercy of power and chance. The certainty of death is portrayed in terms of restricted motion. Encased in a sick body and chained in a cart bound for the scaffold, the condemned subject can exercise no control. Again, it is enclosure itself, rather than movement, which troubles Donne, as we can see from his assertion in the elegy "Change": "if a man bee / Chayned to a Galley, yet the Galley is free" (15–16).

As Masood ul-Hasan suggests, the "utter unwilling submission to others" exhibited in the satire chimes with his sympathetic attitude towards prisoners whose plight, being unable to exercise their freedom,

struck a chord with Donne.[25] Indeed, as "The Storme" and "The Calme" suggest, Donne shared his Azores experience with sailors who may have been prisoners or were destined for jail. Parr argues that references to ships "Withering like prisoners" (18) and "totterd sailes" (57) hanging like chains "graphically links" their "destitute condition to the fate that many of the poorer recruits had temporarily avoided."[26] It is perhaps these same sailors that Donne observes throughout "The Storme," "coffin'd" and "imprisoned" in their cabins, a course of action which he himself refuses to take. Rather than seek shelter below deck, Donne's perspectives betray the fact that he was immersed in the tumult of the storm. He observes the rising winds "assaile" (30) the sails, witnesses the confusion of darkness and the noise of waves and thunder, notes sardonically the frightened sailor's emergence from their cabins like "jealous husbands" (50) to hear news of the ship's condition, and envies the Old Testament sleep of Jonas "when the storm rag'd most" (34). The fear of enclosure evidenced by the ship images of *Satyre III* and "Love's War" might, then, be understood as a retrospective comment on Donne's own experience of sea travel. Where, as in his letter to Goodere, he acknowledges the "impotency" of his situation during the storm, it is still preferable to meet death head on rather than hide from it in seclusion.

By "The Storme's" end, Donne's experience of motion is defined by matter in flux and indistinguishable chaos rather than purpose, as the fleet is removed from all stable points of connection, from England and the Azores, from the stars and sun:

> Darknesse, lights elder brother, his birth-right
> Claims o'r this world, and to heaven hath chas'd light.
> All things are one, and that one none can be,
> Since all formes, uniforme deformity
> Doth cover, so that wee, except God say
> Another *Fiat*, shall have no more day.
>
> (67–72)

But the poem's closing image of a primordial chaos in which darkness returns all things to a state of "uniforme deformity," hints at the

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[25]Ul-Hasan, *Donne's Imagery* (Aligarh, India: Faculty of Arts, Muslim University, 1958), p. 46.

[26]Parr, p. 70.

possibility of renewal, since it is from undifferentiated chaos that matter takes form in the creation myths of Christianity and antiquity. As Michel Jeanneret puts it, the "primordial magma is a formless potentiality waiting for its form, the wellspring where the seeds of life are nestled, the symbol par excellence of the desire for transformation."[27] Although death and the end of time threaten during the tumult of the storm, the poem retains a structural circularity in its early suggestions of pregnancy and its closing image of the world's rebirth. Donne noted, in his letter to Goodere, that the impotence of inactivity brought him to the contemplation of death and of nothing. This chaos, and by extension the storm itself, however, is not the nothing that Donne fears, but the potentiality of something. Movement here still carries the suggestion of life and Donne has not given up the hope that God will restore the world to light with "Another *Fiat*."

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In the static world of "The Calme" we find that all motion and, therefore, all hope has disappeared. Donne recounts that the ships are rooted to one spot and the homogenous smooth spaces of sky and sea are a source of torment as they reflect each other as in a "mistresse['s] glasse" (8). So indistinguishable are these spaces that he imagines the ship as a kind of atmospheric phenomenon between heaven and earth, as a cloud, or as Donne puts it, the ship is "meteorlike, save that wee move not, hover" (22). At the beginning of "The Storme" Donne invokes the styles of visual art preferred by both Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Hilliard, as an expression of confidence in his own skills of representation.[28] Alberti's promotion of a central perspective, clear horizon, and definite boundaries in painting created visual spaces which

[27]Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion: Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from da Vinci to Montaigne* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 2.

[28]A "hand, or eye / By *Hilliard* drawne, is worth an history, / By a worse painter made" (3–5). "History" here refers to *istoria*, or history painting, the expansive style preferred by Alberti. On Donne's references to Hilliard and Alberti in this poem, see Ann Hurley, *John Donne's Poetry And Early Modern Visual Culture* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2005), pp. 52–60.

were ordered and rational.[29] In the portraits of Hilliard, the traits of the individual subject often fill the picture plain and constitute the totality of the work.[30] In his *Art of Limning*, he wrote that "all Painting imitateth nature or the life in every thing."[31] For Hilliard, the "life" of every thing included "the inner life, the emotions and passions of his subject, as they outwardly manifest themselves in the appearance of the flesh."[32] So, where Alberti's style stressed the stability of space, and that of the body in space, Hilliard sought to capture the inner "self," by means of the outside.

On the Atlantic, however, this centeredness is lost. Balasopoulos suggests that, "To the eye of the early modern navigator, the open sea presented a sight that was at the antipodes of the centred and isotropic space of Alberti and Brunelleschi."[33] Instead, what the mariner experiences is a space in which horizon, reflection, and light blend to distort visual comprehension. Ever since Aristotle's writings on the subject, the primacy of sight over the other five senses was largely upheld throughout the Renaissance. With Thomas Aquinas's reiteration of Aristotle's theory that "sight judges about sensible objects in a more certain and perfect way than the other senses do," the precedence of vision became entrenched in European thinking.[34] Although the Platonic tradition acknowledged that sight alone, without reason, could often prove deceptive, it was not until the scientific revolution that vision was superseded by touch. As David Summers argues, for Enlightenment thinkers:

> Sight does not apprehend forms, but rather 'motions', or the effect of motions, and in general it might be said that the senses came increasingly to be understood as kinds of touch, as

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[29]See Alberti, *On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[30]See Hilliard, *Nicholas Hilliard's Art of Limning*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney and Linda Bradley Salamon (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983).

[31]Hilliard, p. 22.

[32]Clark Hulse, *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 134.

[33]Balasopoulos, pp. 134–135.

[34]Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John Patrick Rowan, 2 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 1:8.

> the Atomists had long before argued and Aristotle had denied. Also, touch came increasingly to be understood to have the best and final access to the world that sense reveals. 'Feeling' rather than 'seeing' became the metaphor for basic sensation.[35]

This optical condition is true of the mirror-like world of the calm. Donne's confident claims to truthful representation in "The Storme" are unachievable in a space of no discernable features or motions. Unable to look outward, the mariner's thoughts turn inward, and "feeling" becomes the primary sensation. So, what we find is that just as an Alberti-esque perspectival scene is thwarted by close vision, the self-assuredness of a Hilliard portrait is replaced by existential doubt on the nature of being.

The prevailing theme throughout "The Calme" is that of motion and purpose lost. Sailors, mad with the tropical fever, "Calenture" (23), or the inescapable heat, seek relief by leaping into the sea only to be met by "great fishes jawes" (24) or a "brimstone Bath" (30). The "crawling Gallies" (37), by virtue of their internally generated movement, self-propelled by oars, now mock the immobilized wind-dependant tall ships, becoming almost an emblem of the mechanical motion which will replace the absolute system of Aristotle. Towards the poem's end Donne reflects on "Whether a rotten state, and hope of gaine" (39), or "the thirst / Of honour, or faire death" (41–42), "out-pusht" him in the direction of the expedition and concludes that, "I lose my end" (43). With the loss of impetus, of an original motive force, comes the loss of purpose. "Stagge, dogge, and all which from, or towards flies," Donne continues, "Is paid with life, or pray, or doing dyes" (45–46). In their desire for an active death, these lines share the sentiment of his letter to Goodere, that "doing" equates to being. But there is also an additional sense that physical motion constitutes distraction from the troubled motions of the mind when the body is still. The first indication that Donne identifies with flight from the responsibilities of thought comes with his allusion to the story of Jonas in "The Storme":

> *Ionas*, I pitty thee, and curse those men,
> Who when the storm rag'd most, did wake thee then;

[35]Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 326.

> Sleepe is paines easiest salve, and doth fulfill
> All offices of death, except to kill.
> (33–36)

Donne, here, interprets Jonas's seaborne flight from the commandment of God not only as an instance of fear, a fear of God which he himself will later re-enact in "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westward," but also as an act of forgetting. Jonas's sleep here becomes a "salve," a way of negating pain, and an imitation of the release of death.[36] Donne's own confused reflections on his original motives for joining the voyage, for wealth, honor, death, or to banish the "queasy pain" of love, suggest a concurrent desire for mental escape. In his essay, "On Diversion," Michel de Montaigne describes this condition of the mind's impulsive avoidance of pain:

> Everywhere else it is the same. A painful notion takes hold of me; I find it quicker to change it than to subdue it. I substitute a contrary one for it, or, if I cannot, at all events a different one. Variation always solaces, dissolves, and dissipates. If I cannot combat it, I escape it; and in fleeing I dodge, I am tricky. By changing place, occupation, and company, I escape into the throng of other occupations and thoughts, where it loses my trace and so loses me.[37]

Activity, changing "place, occupation, and company," allows Donne to stall and redirect the melancholic tendencies of the inactive body.

On the becalmed ocean, however, the healing effects of motion are inoperable. Donne not only witnesses the frustration of personal idleness, but also the immobility of extended non-descript space, a space which is antithetical to the dynamic theory of nature postulated by Aristotle. To move "from or towards" can be both the conditions of life and death, but what Donne experiences on the smooth sea is a state of non-existence.

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[36]Donne uses Jonas as an example of a willing death, or suicide, in *Biathanatos* (ed. Ernest W. Sullivan, II [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984], pp. 102–103).

[37]Montaigne, "On Diversion," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp. 630–637, quotation from pp. 634–635.

"What are wee then?" Donne asks, "How little more alas, / Is man now, then before he was! he was / Nothing; for us, wee are for nothing fit" (51–53). Looking back to "The Storme's" closing image of chaos, he points to man's generation out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, and so recalls its potentiality. But for Donne and his companions, their current condition is potential unrealized, they "are for nothing fit," or, as the letter to Goodere states, "to be no part of any body is to be nothing." This position is understandable when we consider that bodies, things, matter, and all tangible substances were, for Aristotle as for the new philosophers, inseparable from motion. In this respect, the still world of "The Calme" has the veil of unreality, since to remove movement is to remove animation. Donne would later echo his thoughts on death as activity in *The Second Anniuersarie*, when he observed that "there is motion in corruption" (22). An active death on the stormy sea is, therefore, preferable to the void of the calm in which motion is even removed from the process of decay. As the famous line, which Ben Jonson had by heart, expresses, "in one place lay / Feathers and dust, to day and yesterday" (17–18). The last lines of the poem, "Wee have no power, no will, no sense; I lye, / I should not then thus feele this miserie" (55–56), end with the bleak realization that Donne retains his sense of feeling in an inanimate space where there is nothing to feel. In the unreal world of "The Calme," he, therefore, comes close to the seventeenth-century understanding of motion, as defined by Blaise Pascal: "our nature consists in movement; absolute stillness is death."[38] For Donne, the active struggle against the storm removed the finality of death and hinted at the possibility of renewal, but in "The Calme" he has only the unsteady thoughts of non-being, reflected in the immovable surface of the sea.

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[38]Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi, intro. and notes Anthony Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 126.