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More Signs of Donne

Allusions, echoes, answers, voiceprints, suggestions, signs—Donne persists in poems, stories, plays, and a variety of forms of expository prose today. Whether as a source for quotation or provocation, as interlocutor or guide, Donne remains an ongoing presence in the contemporary literary imagination. We will continue to highlight such sightings, soundings, and substantive encounters—like those in the following essay—in future volumes of the *John Donne Journal*.

The Editor

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Jarman, Donne, and the Art of Holy Living and Dying

Raymond-Jean Frontain

As Tony Peake, the biographer of artist, filmmaker and gay activist Derek Jarman, observes, Donne—like Marlowe and Shakespeare—had "profoundly influenced" Jarman's thought in early life and "fed directly into subsequent projects."[1] Documenting Jarman's engagement with the two Renaissance playwrights is a relatively simple task inasmuch as two of Jarman's best known feature films are "cut-ups" (the term is Jarman's) of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

[1] Peake, *Derek Jarman: A Biography* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1996; rpt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 71.

and Marlowe's *Edward II*, each of which adapts the original source to express Jarman's own highly idiosyncratic views on such topics as the occult, late twentieth century sexual politics, and the redemptive powers of the human imagination.[2]

Jarman's engagement with Donne proves more difficult to analyze insofar as no text by Donne serves as the basis of a Jarman film, and the majority of Jarman's quotations of Donne seem to have been made in passing in the relatively private forum of his journals rather than the public arena of his cinema, making their significance for Jarman provocative but more difficult to evaluate than his engagement with Marlowe and Shakespeare. I suspect, however, that in addition to Donne's expressing the mannerist or baroque sensibility that Jarman valued so highly, Donne's celebration in the *Songs and Sonets* of a lover's ability to create a space where a non-normative relationship can thrive,

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[2] "Marlowe is the mirror in which Shakespeare finds himself," Jarman observes (*Smiling in Slow Motion*, ed. Keith Collins [London: Century, 2000], p. 30). In addition, Jarman's *The Angelic Conversations* (1984) makes a highly homoerotic visual drama out of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, which are recited in voice over by actress Judi Dench; for Jarman's intentions in making the film, see his *Kicking the Pricks* (1987. Rpt. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1997), pp.133-48. Jarman's *Dancing Ledge* (edited by Shaun Allen. 1984; rpt. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1993) is in large part a diary of his film projects through 1984 and, thus, contains his thoughts concerning how he will film *The Tempest.* (At one point, for example, he considered making a film in which "a mad Prospero, rightly imprisoned by his brother, played all the parts," p. 183). Jarman's film scripts for *Caravaggio* (*Derek Jarman's Caravaggio*, with photographs by Gerald Incandela [London: Thames and Hudson, 1986]) and *Edward II* (*Queer Edward II* [London: British Film Institute, 1992]) have been published, the still shots reprinted therein both demonstrating his reliance upon a baroque or mannerist aesthetic, and permitting analysis of how he used Renaissance art and theater to comment on late twentieth century political events and social values. Michael Charlesworth observes that in Jarman's film *Jubilee*, which celebrates the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, Jarman juxtaposes the reign of the current monarch with her predecessor, Elizabeth I, in such a way that the "sixteenth century acts as a golden age which shows by contrast the pitiful state of the projected near future" (*Derek Jarman* [London: Reaktion Books, 2011], p. 65). Writers such as Marlowe, Shakespeare and Donne hold such a prominent place in Jarman's imagination because they represent the imaginative freedom that he felt was denied artists in post-war Britain.

despite the animosity of those people who are spiritually unenlightened and/or sexually repressed, appealed to Jarman, particularly as Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party attempted to impose their own grossly unimaginative and morally bankrupt view of the world on the citizens of the U. K. through the infamous (and subsequently repealed) Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988.[3] In addition, during his last years of life, as Jarman's health was eroded by a series of opportunistic infections stemming from AIDS, Donne's secular and religious poems, and possibly his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, offered Jarman lessons both in holy living and holy dying, allowing him to fashion his death in one of the most haunting and poetically provocative manners since, as Izaak Walton reports, Donne fashioned his own.

In his diary for his last years, published posthumously under the title *Smiling in Slow Motion*, Jarman records reading Donne's "The Sunne Rising" while hospitalized for one of his many HIV-related illnesses, and his feeling that the poem "makes up for this shadowy [hospital] room where the sun never falls and light is provided by six florescent tubes glaring behind glass panels in the ceiling."[4] One of the infections to

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[3] Section 28 prohibited local authorities from "intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality or publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality," and from "promot[ing] the teaching in any mainland school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (qtd. in Jarman, *At Your Own Risk: A Saint's Testament* [1992. Rpt. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1993], pp. 127-28). As protesters pointed out (the newly knighted actor Ian McKellen prominent among them), the act in effect prohibited the teaching of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in government-sponsored schools (including Oxford and Cambridge Universities), the performance of Marlowe's *Edward II* or Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in any theater receiving financial support from the government, and—at the height of rising HIV infections and AIDS-related fatalities—informing the public about safe sex practices.

[4] *Smiling in Slow Motion*, p. 286. Jarman's six volumes of life writings—*Dancing Ledge* (1984), *Kicking the Pricks* (1987), *Modern Nature* (1991; rpt. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1994), *At Your Own Risk: A Saint's Testament* (1992), *Derek Jarman's Garden* (with photographs by Howard Sooley, London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), and *Smiling in Slow Motion* (2000)—are eclectic mixes of diary entries, film production notes, political commentary, nature observations, and autobiographical recollection.

which Jarman proved vulnerable was cytomegalovirus, which attacked the nerve tissue in his retina, rendering him, first, color blind (an enormous trial for a visual artist) and, finally, completely blind in one eye. Peake notes that "as Jarman became increasingly unable to read himself and began to rely more and more on others reading to him, he particularly enjoyed being read to from the metaphysical poets,"[5] an anthology of whose works his lover, Keith Collins, brought to him in his room in the Hospital Church of St. Bartholomew's.[6] It was this same artificially lighted hospital room that Jarman describes as "a monastic cell, the windows are frosted glass, the sun does not fall through the permanent blinds drawn across them."[7] But the diary entry for 29 November 1992 suggests that on this specific occasion Jarman was able to read "The Sunne Rising" on his own, without a friend's mediation. Following his release from the hospital, "to celebrate his admiration for Donne, and for this poem in particular, a group of his friends placed a sculpted fragment of Donne's verse on the south wall of the cottage" that Jarman had purchased in Dungeness, whose garden he made into his final great work of art.[8]

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[5] Peake, p. 567, fn 116.

[6] *Smiling*, p. 268.

[7] Ibid., p. 266.

[8] Peake, p. 521. Jarman records the progress of the installation in his diary entry for 17 May 1993: "Peter and HB put up the poem," and later that same day "HB very happy putting up the poem" (*Smiling*, p. 349). (Peter is Peter Ellingham, and "HB" is Keith Collins, whom Jarman considered his one true love and whom he had nicknamed "Hinney Beast.") Significantly, this is just nine months before Jarman's death on 20 February 1994.

Charleswsorth (pp. 135-40) offers an astute analysis of the imaginative power of Jarman's garden, which included twenty-five garden plants that were not expected to flourish in the region's sandy soil and shale, as well as fifteen wild plants, which traditional English gardens would have excluded as unsightly. Situated in the shadow of a nuclear power plant, the garden represents "a defiantly life-affirming struggle against an unfavourable situation, triumphantly carried out" (p. 136). Jarman's use of pieces of metal commercial fishing implements and wartime defenses that washed up on the shore of the English Channel seemed to "concentrate the cultural message" of how something starkly beautiful could be made of the instruments of pollution and destruction (p. 137). The carved wooden letters that spelled out the lines from Donne's poem were painted black and affixed to a black-painted wall, "so that

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It is not difficult to determine why "The Sunne Rising" should have taken such a strong hold on Jarman's imagination and why it became such a vital talisman for the dying man that his friends thought to nail in carved wooden letters its first ten and final six lines to the outer, south-facing wall of his home as though to infuse the interior space with the spirit of the poem and reinforce Jarman's declining strength with Donne's brio. On the simplest level, of course, the poem promises the same perpetual high noon sought by the speaker of Donne's "Lecture upon the Shadow," holding the speaker and his beloved in suspended

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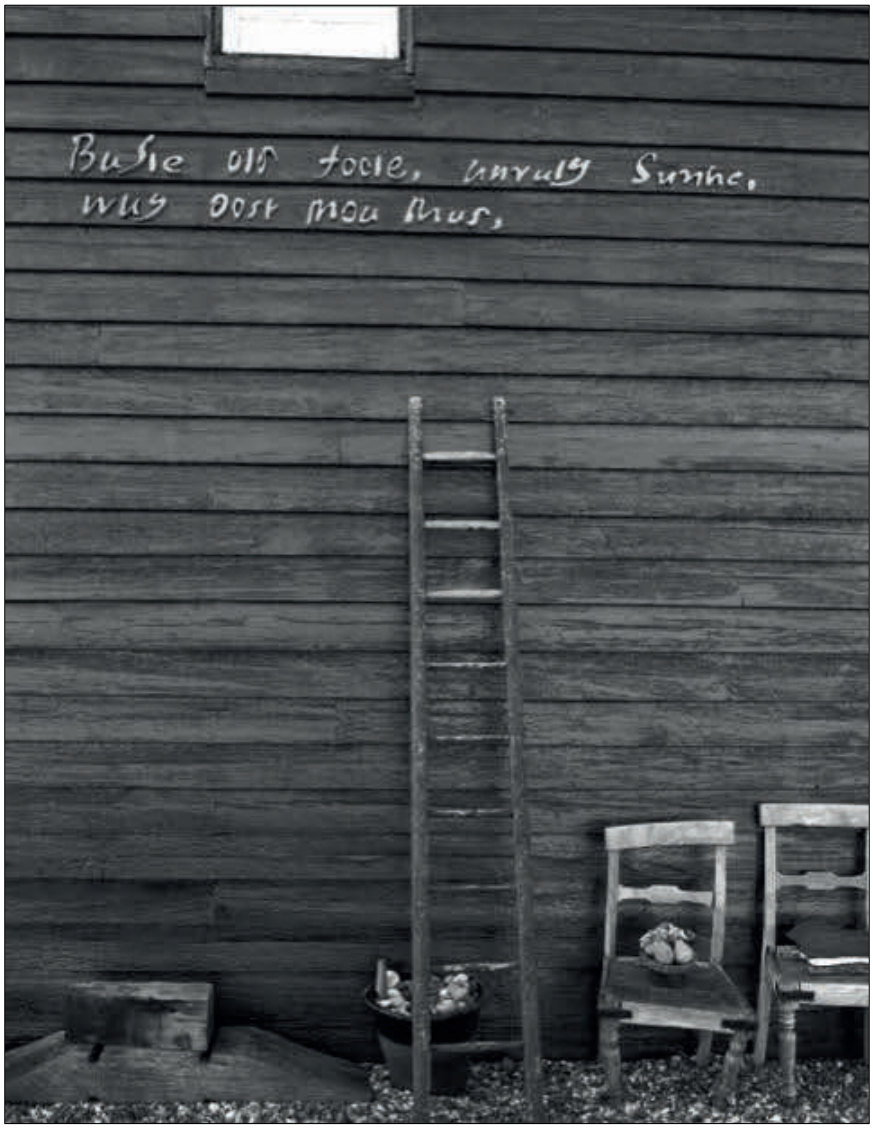
the shadows they cast project them three-dimensionally proud of the surrounding black paint and allow the poem to be read" (p. 139). Because Jarman considered Dungeness "to be the sunniest place in Britain," the poem's description of "the sunbeams poking their way inside the house to disturb the lovers whose sanctuary it is [. . .] integrates Prospect Cottage with its setting conceptually" (pp. 139-40).



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animation, and, thus, placing them outside the ravages of time—a condition that could only be envied by the emotionally exhausted and physically depleted Jarman.[9]

[9] Jarman celebrates the life-affirming power of the sun in his unproduced film script for *Akenaten* (1976, printed in *Up in the Air: Collected Film Scripts*, ed. Michel O'Pray [London: Vintage, 1996], pp. 1-40). The script treats both the succession of the Egyptian pharaohs from Amenhotep to Akenaten to Tutanaten, and the removal of the empire's capital from Thebes to Akhetaten, in terms of Akenaten's creating a new cult of the sun god Amonra, whose true name he learns in a revelation is Aten. The script not only calls for the performance of a number of rituals worshiping the sun, but redefines the transfer of dynastic (and, thus, divine) power, which originally took place through heterosexual relations (in which the new pharaoh marries his sister or mother), but which now occurs through homosexual relations (in which the pharaoh chooses his successor by initiating a sexual relationship with the more beguiling of his two sons).

But, more provocatively, the power of Donne's lovers to create a charmed space impervious to the authority of a society that demands strict conformity to its rules must have brought not simply a breath, but a gale, of fresh air into Jarman's fetid sick room and troubled mind. As Murray Roston observes, "The Sunne Rising" offers an extraordinary "challenge to the New Philosophy itself, provocatively reaffirming in the face of all contrary scientific evidence the pre-eminence of man in the cosmic pattern, and the impregnability of his inner experience."[10] The poem's first stanza not only dismisses the sun "as a weary, aging factotum" but unequivocally rejects "any attempt to make lovers' hours conform to those rigid measurements of time fit only for schoolboys and sour apprentices."[11]

> Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
> Why dost thou thus,
> Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
> Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?
> Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide
> Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,
> Go tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
> Call countrey ants to harvest offices;
> Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
> Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.
> (1-10)[12]

According to the dominant theory implied by the poem of how society should function, "Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices" *must*, however unwillingly, obey the demands of time, much as court huntsmen eager for preferment *must* follow the mercurial whims of the king. While the reference to "countrey ants" that are called "to harvest offices" most probably alludes to agrarian workers whose day and year are sharply regulated by the position of the sun in the sky, the line also

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[10] Roston, *The Soul of Wit: A Study of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 14.

[11] Ibid., pp. 72, 197.

[12] All quotations of Donne's poetry come from *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1967).

suggests how everyone who is a slave to time and allows his/her life to be governed by a dictatorial external force is rendered mechanical and inhumane: individuals who subordinate their natural desires to the artificial hope for advancement are like so many ants scurrying about to drag home as bounty mere crumbs of food, which can only appear inconsequential to the eye of the poem's supremely self-confident speaker.

Lovers' "seasons," conversely, are governed by a different "motion." In the lovers' world, there is no reason to trudge dejectedly through the streets to school or to the master's shop, or to gallop after the king in the pursuit of favor. In this alternative vision of the world, the speaker and his beloved enjoy a transcendental stasis: "She'is all States, and all Princes, I, / Nothing else is" (21-22). They, rather than the sun of the New Philosophy, enjoy a cosmic centrality: "This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare" (30). In "The Sunne Rising," as in other love poems like "The good-morrow," "The Canonization" or "A Valediction forbidding mourning," Donne's speaker is so confident as to the rightness of his values that he rejects outright the social protocols that everyone else accepts uncritically.

I suspect that it is this element of "The Sunne Rising" that proved particularly hospitable to Jarman. In *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman recalls the pressure to conform to social and sexual norms that made his adolescence and his undergraduate years at King's College, London, so painful: "The repression was difficult to confront—like finding your way down a foggy street. [. . .] Heterosoc kept its tabs on me."[13] "Heterosoc" (that is, "heterosexual society") became Jarman's term for the unsympathetic, brutally repressive majority that, like a heavy fog, cut him off from the life-enhancing power of the sun that were his burgeoning relationships with other men.[14] Donne's juxtaposition of

[13] *At Your Own Risk*, p. 42.

[14] In *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman notes that the passage in 1967 of the Sexual Offenses Act, which in effect repealed the Labouchere Amendment under which Oscar Wilde had been prosecuted, made relatively no difference in the lives of gay men in the U. K.:

> For the first twenty-five years of my life I lived as a criminal, and the next twenty-five were spent as a second-class citizen, deprived of equality and human rights. No right to adopt

"dull sublunary lovers' love" with that of the speaker and his beloved who deserve to be canonized for love found its analogue (but not its audacious tone) in lines by Michelangelo that Jarman discovered in 1962 and copied into his diary:

> And if the vulgar and malignant crowd
> misunderstood the love with which we're blessed,
> its worth is not affected in the least,
> our faith and honest love can still feel proud.[15]

I suspect that it was exactly Donne's rebellion against the commonplace and his concomitant assertion of what Roston terms the "inviolability of inner experience" that Jarman found so deeply engaging, not simply in his last months, but from those early years when he first read Donne as an undergraduate.

Significantly, the means that Jarman found to declare his independence from "the vulgar and malignant crowd" of time servers—

> children—and if I had children, I could be declared an unfit parent; illegal in the military; an age of consent of twenty-one [as opposed to eighteen for heterosexuals]; no right of inheritance; no right of access to a loved one; no right to public affection; no right to an unbiased education; no legal sanction of my relationships and no right to marry. These restrictions subtly deprived me of my freedom. (p. 4)

Jarman later goes on to say that the passage of Section 28 in 1988, which was driven in part by a newly emboldened Conservative Party's third consecutive victory at the polls and by conservative reaction to the emerging AIDS crisis, "changed my perspective radically. I'd always been under the impression that Heterosoc was pretty dim. Now I know that I was right. Actively or through indifference they murdered us" (p. 116). Ironically, as historian Peter Ackroyd observes, "the effects of Clause 28 were, as it turned out, minimal": "in February 1994 the age of sexual consent for queer men was lowered to eighteen and then, six years later, to sixteen. In that year, 2000, the ban on queers serving in the military was finally lifted. What had once been barred or banned was now accepted and welcomed" (*Queer City: Gay London from the Romans to the Present Day* [New York: Abrams, 2018], p. 225). Unfortunately, Jarman did not live long enough to see how badly Thatcher had overplayed her hand.

[15] Qtd. in *At Your Own Risk*, p. 46.

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that is, from the country ants hurrying to harvest offices—were likewise suggestively Donnean: sex and art. The promiscuous sex that he began enjoying after accepting his orientation and acting on his desires "was liberating. It liberated me in a moment from the censure" of others, as

well as from "five years of self-denial" or internalized homophobia in early adulthood.[16] And much as Donne delighted in parodying literary conventions, turning them upside down and inside out, Jarman found in art what he termed "my weapons against the other order," in particular the use of camp and the full frontal male nudity that he employed in his films to *épater les bourgeois*.[17]

Clearly, developing a highly charged sexual personality and delighting in making poems (or films) that will shock Aunt Tillie and Uncle Fred are acts of rebellion common to adolescents and not necessarily the indication of a conversation across centuries by a dying gay filmmaker with a long dead metaphysical divine. But consider the language on which Jarman draws when, recalling the defeat in 1953 of Conservative Member of Parliament Robert Boothby's legislation labeling homosexuals "exhibitionist[s] and proselytisers," as well as "a danger to others, especially the young," Jarman rues the fact that:

> Forty years later [that is, in 1993, just one year before Jarman died] all the old ground is being fought over. I have lived for fifty years as an unequal in this country, enveloped by hate; to ignore it I insulated myself, subtly changed my life. *No man is an island*, but each man created his own island to cope with the prejudice and cruelty.[18]

That is, Jarman retreated into the "one little room" that, as Donne celebrates in "The Sunne Rising" and "The good-morrow," is "an everywhere"—into the private realm in which the lovers can place themselves beyond the reach of "the vulgar and malicious crowd" by creating an alternate cosmos whose seasons run to very different

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[16] Ibid., p. 124. "Safe sex can be awfully drab if you've experienced sodomy. I'm not certain that I want comfortable sexual encounters, deep down it all seems too cosily suburban and fits too nicely—that's the right word—into the chintzy Englishness of it all," Jarman volunteers in *Kicking the Pricks* (p. 194). Indeed, there was a political purpose to the very public promiscuity of gay men of Jarman's generation: "We would enjoy ourselves, something the repressed hated. Our openness hurt them" (*Kicking*, p. 46).

[17] *Dancing Ledge*, p. 51.

[18] *At Your Own Risk*, p. 23, emphasis added.

motions than militantly well organized and repressive "Heterosoc."[19] This is a strikingly political use of what has become the most famous passage of Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*:

> No Man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *mannor* of thy *friends*, or of *thine owne* were; Any Mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.[20]

The echo is made the more unusual by the manner in which Jarman appropriates the *Songs and Sonets*' philosophy of a pair of lovers' necessary removal from an unsympathetic, even antagonistic society in order to invert Donne's moving plea in the *Devotions* for communality.

If Jarman found in Donne's "The Sunne Rising" the welcome confirmation of his own decision to live independently of a society that is hostile to the values that the poet finds essential to holy living, Donne also offered a model for how the AIDS-weakened Jarman might achieve a holy death. While there is no direct connection between Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and Jarman's *Modern Nature*, the latter—written in 1989-90 while Jarman first labored under the death sentence that an HIV-positive diagnosis then invariably proved—parallels Donne's use of the temporal cycle of his illness to emblematically represent his spiritual death and subsequent

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[19] Jarman's propensity for creating private spaces as refuges from Heterosoc—what he terms "escape houses" (*Modern Nature*, p. 276)—is on a par with Donne's celebration of spaces like "loves hallow'd temple, this soft bed" ("Elegie: Going to Bed," l. 18). In Jarman's personal life there are most notably his greenhouse bedroom in a "derelict" warehouse in Bankside (*Kicking the Pricks*, p. 55), and, of course, his cottage and garden at Dungeness so beautifully photographed by Howard Cooley in *Derek Jarman's Garden*. Similarly, in his films, Edward/Jarman is able to triumph over the homophobia of the Church of England and Mrs. Mary Whitehouse in the final scene of *Edward II*, in which Edward awakens from a nightmare to find himself safely, sensuously and contentedly in bed with his lover.

[20] Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 87.

resurrection. The journal uses, rather than Donne's sequence of twenty-three days, the monthly cycle of the year as a meditation upon what the post-industrial revolution has done to the natural world (Jarman's cottage and garden sat defiantly in the shadow of a nuclear reactor), and upon what is natural or unnatural in terms of human sexual/romantic behavior. The meditations enact a poetry of paradox in which sickness and death prove the portal to new growth or spiritual renewal, Jarman extending nature into a complex metaphysical conceit that surpasses the complexity of even the most densely packed of Donne's.[21]

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[21] As James Winny observes of the *Devotions*, "probably no other work of Donne's reveals him so clearly, or shows how strongly his outlook was coloured at this time [1623-24] by the idea of death. As a sick and possibly dying man he becomes, in his own macabre judgment, a symbolic figure, representing both the morally diseased state of man and the steadily worsening condition of the natural world" (*A Preface to Donne* [New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1970], p. 39). Jarman similarly associates his own survival with that of the natural world, i.e. his garden: "But what *do* I worry about? The garden mostly: the hurting winds and scalding sun. I worry about my stomach, as the crypto-whatever that's got hold of it leaves me with nausea" (*Modern Nature*, p. 77). Recognizing that "Dungeness might seem the least hospitable environment" (p. 128) for the plants and trees that he somehow manages to grow there, he regularly marvels that somehow his garden thrives despite the sandy soil and sea-salty rain, and notes that he cultivates it in memory of friends lost to AIDS:

> Old friends died young
>
> The virus attacks creation
> Creativity withers
> No consuming passions
> Only these slow melancholy days
>
> The garden is built for dear friends
> Howard, Paul, Terence, David, Robert, and Ken,
> And many others, each stone has a life to tell
> I cannot invite you into this house (p. 178)

Jarman associates his release from the hospital with his chance to get back to work in his garden (p. 258), and goes so far as to parallel his own life span with

However, a more dramatic parallel—and a more securely substantiated instance of indebtedness—exists in the ways that the two men fashioned their own deaths. Izaak Walton narrates how, in his final days, Donne summoned an artist and posed for him while standing on an urn in a winding sheet "so tyed with knots at his head and feet, and his hands so placed, as dead bodies are usually fitted to be shrowded and put into their Coffin, or grave."[22] A portion of the sheet was turned aside to "shew his lean, pale, and death-like face, which was purposely turned toward the East, from whence he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus."[23]

However much Walton's description of Donne's fashioning of his own death may prove an act of hagiographical myth-making on the part of the devout biographer, his narrative remains unparalleled in English culture as the most haunting description of a poet's dramatically orchestrating his final moments . . . except possibly by Jarman's choreographing of his own funeral rites. For, similarly, as biographer Peake recounts, when it became clear that his end was approaching, Jarman—who'd initially decided on a private cremation, after which his ashes were to be scattered in his garden—underwent a 180-degree change in attitude and wrote out explicit directions for a very public and emotionally charged funeral service. The directions included a list of songs (such as "The Skye Boat Song," "Abide with Me," and "Stormy Weather," the latter having been used to such poignant effect at the close of Jarman's *Tempest*) with the instruction that the service "would be punctuated by some of the sacred sonnets of John Donne [. . .] and a passage from the works of Siegfried Sassoon."[24] In addition, just as congregants who attended Donne's delivery of his "Deaths Duell" sermon and, thus, "saw his tears, and heard his faint and hollow voice," professed "they thought the Text prophetically chosen, and that Dr. Donne *had preach't his own Funeral Sermon*,"[25] so Jarman "wrote an address

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that of his garden: "I do not wish to die . . . yet. I would love to see my garden through several summers" (p. 310).

[22] *Life of Dr. John Donne* in *Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, and Mr. George Herbert*, ed. George Saintsbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 78.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Peake, pp. 518-19.

[25] Walton, p. 75.

to be delivered when his coffin was carried from the church to the grave" in which he excoriated the church-sponsored homophobia that proved "a shadow in my sunshine day [that] has haunted me all my days." And, "in order to confirm the note of joy, he suggested a marquee for afterwards and maybe a Jamaican steel band."[26]

The ceremony was to be conducted by members of the London chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of men dressed as nuns who first organized in San Francisco in 1979 to combat the religion-infused homophobia being promulgated by the dour and censorious likes of Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell, and who sought to bear witness to an alternative religious spirit of joyful celebration.[27] The London convent included Mother Fecundity of the Mass Uprising and Sister Frigidity of the Nocturnal Emission, both of whom had appeared in Jarman's *Edward II* and had—on September 22, 1991, which Jarman had termed "the happiest day of his life"—conducted a ceremony canonizing the still-living Jarman as St. Derek of Dungeness of the Order of Celluloid Knights.[28]

We don't know which sonnets the Sisters recited at his funeral service, but earlier Jarman himself had associated his impending death with "the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Donne—*Death be not Proud*. That's why I love Wilfred Owen—I feel a sympathy, it [that is, the AIDS pandemic] is just a different war" than World War I, whose

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[26] Peake, pp. 518-19.

[27] As the AIDS pandemic wreaked havoc on gay communities in America, the Sisters worked on the front line as care givers and protest leaders, ministering in private to the dying while in public conducting exorcisms of figures like Phyllis Schafly, Jerry Falwell, Pope John Paul II, and the U. S. House of Representatives whom they considered the satanic enemies of social equality and basic human compassion. As they explain in their mission statement: "We believe all people have a right to express their unique joy and beauty and we use humor and irreverent wit to expose the forces of bigotry, complacency and guilt that chain the human spirit" ("Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence," *En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisters_of_Perpetual_Indulgence*; site consulted 2 January 2019). In *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman quotes a press release that identifies the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as "a worldwide order of gay nuns, whose mission is to expiate homosexual guilt from all and to replace it with universal joy" (p. 131).

[28] Peake, pp. 484-85.

ignominies Owen recorded in his poems.[29] In this meditation Jarman seems to return to the ability of lovers in "The Sunne Rising" to defend themselves from the seventeenth-century equivalents of the institutionalized homophobia of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and self-appointed guardian of British morals Mrs. Mary Whitehouse by creating that one little room which is an everywhere when he offers a dying wish: "I hope boys will carry on falling in love with boys and girls with girls, and *they* [that is, Thatcher's conservative government]'ll find no way to change that."[30]

Like his films, Jarman's Donne-centered funeral service mixed camp with extraordinary emotional poignancy as a bearded, six-foot tall man in a fourteenth century Belgian nun's habit recited, most likely among others of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, "Death be not proud." As Clayton G. MacKenzie observes, in this sonnet "the role of Death and his/her would-be victim are vigorously *reversed*. It is the poem's persona [that is, the poem's speaker] who comes to fulfill a function as the *danse macabre* oppressor, the relentless tormentor and taunter who reminds Death of his fragile mortality."[31] By supplementing the poem's undermining of conventions attached to the *memento mori* tradition with the reversal of gender expectations in the religious transvestism of the poem's performance, Jarman has orchestrated a mix of such broad, defiant comedy and poignant sense of loss, that he made it impossible for mourners to know whether they were bemoaning Jarman's premature passing at age 52 or celebrating the master of camp who—with the snap of his fingers and a masterfully raised eyebrow—triumphs over supposedly all-powerful death.[32]

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[29] *At Your Own Risk*, p. 117. In *Modern Nature*, Jarman asks "What if the present were the world's last night?" (p. 237), echoing the opening line of what Shawcross prints as the ninth of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, "What if this present were the worlds last night?" (p. 343).

[30] Ibid.

[31] *Emblem and Icon in John Donne's Poetry and Prose* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 29.

[32] Les Ballets Trocaderos de Monte Carlo—a company of men who danced in tutus and *en point*—was able to achieve a similarly complex and highly ambivalent effect. In the troupe's parody of *Swan Lake*, for example, the audience would initially be taken aback by the sight of men with beards and hairy chests swarm onstage in toile tutus and feathered headdresses, only to

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Claire Falck astutely notes that Jarman and Donne were "fellows in suffering and art" who "claimed and conquered the liminal spaces of the borderlands, both in art and life by observing the indignities of sickness and oppression with exacting and inexorable attention and refusing to

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gasp in astonishment as those same men danced gracefully *en point*, something that for centuries ballet afficionados had claimed was physiologically impossible considering the different centers of gravity enjoyed by the male and the female bodies. The poignancy of Odette's "Dance of the Dying Swan," however, would then be undercut as feathers molted from his/her costume and the dancer's eyes bulged in comic horror as he/she tried to figure out what course to take. The audience's sympathy for the dying Odette, and appreciation of his/her graceful dance movements, mixed with comic delight in the buffoonery of the molting feathers, making it impossible for an audience member to separate sorrow at the death of such a beautiful creature from the joy to be taken in the absurd parody.

submit to their orders of meaning."[33] Their sympathy derives in part from a shared baroque aesthetic. Relying on the theory of baroque allegory developed by Walter Benjamin in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Hugh Grady identifies the baroque aesthetic as

> a manifestation of a broader transition to modernity and one that was consequently reacting to and trying to accommodate the loss of the medieval loci of meanings, a situation Benjamin summarized as an "empty world" creative of the disparate reactions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.[34]

In the baroque world view, "the world is emptied of intrinsic meaning and bathed in melancholy and loss."[35] Grady identifies that melancholy as one of the animating principles of Donne's *Songs and Sonets* in which the poet attempts in the more cynical love poems to assert the urges of a Dionysian desire that redeems that emptiness, or, in the poems of mutual love, to create "utopian island realms within the darker ocean of despair."[36]

Grady's emphasis on the attempt by the speaker of Donne's poem to construct within a "public" domain that has been emptied of significance "a new 'private' domain . . . of passionate love and sexuality seen as the redeeming feature of a fallen world"[37] seems particularly apt for Jarman who, in the last months of his life, took "The Sunne Rising" as his talisman while investing his remaining energies in the cultivation of a garden that stood defiantly in the shadow of a nuclear power plant. The aesthetic of fragmentation that Grady argues animates Donne's *Songs and Sonets* and *The Anniversaries* seems to describe equally well the aesthetic that informs certain features of Jarman's films in which—in *Edward II*, for example—twentieth century political figures appear in a visually jarring way alongside Marlowe's characters from medieval

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[33] Falck, Panel Response, Thirty-Fourth Annual John Donne Society Conference, Baton Rouge, LA, 15 February 2019.

[34] *John Donne and Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 97.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 98.

[37] Ibid., p. 119.

history, dreams segue with reality, and camp is used as an individual's best defense against the public world's oppressive cruelty. In each case, the viewer is rendered uncertain of what he/she is witnessing, and what values ultimately hold. In Falck's words, the "broader transition to modernity" that Benjamin and Grady see as an essential feature of the baroque is readily apparent in the manner that Jarman found in Donne not only a model for how to construct "a new 'private' domain" but also how to find "healing, restoration, and communal rejuvenation from the depths of sickness, oppression and isolation."

University of Central Arkansas