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Illumina Tenebras Nostras Domina — Donne at Evensong

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Even as illustrious Dean of St Paul's, Donne left undone those things which he ought to have done and carried on doing those things which he ought not to have done. Walton maintained that in "his penitential years, viewing some of the pieces that had been loosely... scattered in his youth," Donne wished to destroy the wanton evidence of his poetry.[1] Yet he never did, nor did he disown his Lothian portrait though it perpetuated the myth of the moody and seductive younger self dramatized in the *Songs and Sonets.* Indeed "that picture of mine which is taken in shadows and was made many years before I was of this profession"[2]—around 1595—became a treasured, lifelong possession. The hallowed inscription framing his picture—*illumina tenebr[as] nostras Domina*—helped to give the Lothian portrait cult status among his circle of friends; and both before and after his death, Donne's acquaintances would closely study its mystifying legend and speculate about its liturgical source and meaning.[3] He would take the Lothian, like an old intimate, all the way to his private quarters at the Deanery and hang it alongside an eclectic collection of paintings which were passed on after death from one friend to another. These pictures included a Titian of "Our Lady, and Christ, and St. John" that Donne would bequeath James Hay in 1631 and the "picture of Mary Magdaline, and my night shadowed picture, and peece of Appollo and the Muses" that Christopher Brooke left Donne in his will of 1627. Brooke's handsome bequest suggests that Donne was not the only member of his coterie to fancy the 'school of night' pose that Shakespeare satirized in *Love's Labours Lost;* and the three pictures illustrate the search for love, religion and enlightenment that is so strong a theme in both Donne's

poetry and the Lothian portrait. When it came his turn to "scape stormy dayes, (and) chuse an Everlasting night" ("A Hymne to Christ," 1. 28), Donne would leave Robert Ker the Lothian portrait, as if he wished, even in eternal rest, to be remembered as a melancholy lover in shadow, beseeching a lady to lighten his darkness.[4]

If wills are a testimonial to the abiding attachments of a lifetime, I would like to explore here the idea that the Lothian portrait was Donne's dark double, mirroring the changing moods of his soul, reflecting an attraction to the night that found its most perfect expression in religious devotion to Anglican Evensong. At this Anglican night office, worshippers were accustomed to pray that they might be "defended from the fear of our enemies" and might "pass our time in rest and quietness."[5] On the eve of his dangerous mission in 1619 with James Hay, then Viscount Doncaster, to Protestant Bohemia, epicenter of the Thirty Years War, Donne would compose the "Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany." His declaration here that "Churches are best for Prayer, that have least light" (1.25)[6] suggests that the hymn was conceived as a private evening prayer and that the dim light of this service made him feel closer in spirit to Christ who so often went off on his own to pray in the night. John Carey reads this poem as Donne's melodramatic flirtation with misfortune, death and suicide (216-18). "To see God only, I goe out of sight;/ And to scape stormy dayes, I chuse an Everlasting night" (ll. 27-28). A more charitable interpretation is that he was simulating the conditions in the world that cried out for the devotional responses of Evensong. The opening antiphons of evening prayer—"O God make speed to save us. Lord make haste to help us" (61)—acquire a whole new meaning for a man who is speeding across the stormy waters of the Channel, possibly under cover of darkness, to God knows what religious and social turmoil. Donne was still in deep mourning for the death of his wife two years previously when he accompanied Hay as chaplain on his conciliatory embassage to the Protestant revolt in Germany. His final entreaty that God will "seale then this bill of my Divorce to All/ On Whom those fainter beames of love did fall" and "marry" those loves to his divine self (ll. 22-24) is a prayer asking for the grace to see all the painful leave-takings of life as

the ship that carries him ever closer to God. It is important to remember in this hymn that Donne's official role was that of religious minister on a peace mission. The sentiments of the second canticle of Evensong, the *Nunc Dimittis,* reflect the spirit in which he set out and the expectant mood of his own song: "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all the people. To be a light to lighten the Gentiles" (Booty, 63). The poet's final hope as he embarks on his sea voyage to Germany is that "to see God only, I goe out of sight:/And to scape stormy dayes, I chuse an Everlasting night" (ll.26-27). While Carey sees suicidal thoughts in these lines, it is more likely that an Anglican minister on active duty was expressing a faith anchored in the collect for aid against all perils that closes Evensong: "lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night" (Booty, 65).

Cranmer, the architect of the Anglican reformed service, crafted prayers that were intended precisely for the need Donne invokes in his "Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany." This was to comfort and strengthen churchgoers as they prepared to face the tribulations waiting them in the world outside.[7] The Latin equivalent of the prayer concluding Evensong heads Donne's Lothian portrait and the controversial efforts to source and decipher this Latin inscription take up the next part of my discussion.

It is now beyond dispute that the legend illustrating this painting—*"Illumina tenebr[as] nostras Domina"*—originally came from Compline, the intimate and quiet hour of prayer closing the liturgical office of the day in the pre-Reformation Church, and, furthermore, that it parodied the final collect symbolically marking nightfall "*illumina quaesumus Domine Deus tenebras nostras.*" However, the first viewers of the Lothian portrait had difficulty not only accurately recalling its Latin inscription but identifying its liturgical source. William Drummond of Hawthornden had a hazy memory that Donne "gave my Lord Ancrum his picture in a melancholic posture, with this word about it '*De tristitia ista libera me Domina*'." Drummond rightly remembered the Latin appeal to a lady but wrongly paraphrased the

Lothian legend as a prayer of petition from the Sarum litanies. Nonetheless he went to a liturgical source that accurately glossed the complicated emotional mood of Donne's painting and later poetry. Of course, brief invocation of a female patron saint in time of need was once a common formula of the older litany expurgated by Cranmer. Litanies had also featured in the processions held during the Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The Lothian illustration wittily alludes to the solemn liturgy commemorating the Passion: its rite for the Tenebrae or Night Office of Matins when the candles in the church were systematically extinguished to mark Christ's abandonment by all but the women who loved Him, and for the later Easter Vigil procession when the Paschal candle was borne like a sacred phallus or glowing lingam into a church shrouded in darkness.

In loosely translating the *tenebras* or darkness of the Lothian caption as *tristitia,* Drummond chose a word that blurred two different forms of sorrow—one worldly and the other godly. Yet *tristitia* is a psychologically insightful word that links the melancholic young lover in the Lothian portrait entreating his mistress as Our Lady of Sorrows with the mournful older figure grieving privately in his poetry for Mary's loss of intercessory power and prestige in the world. While Paul Harland argues that intellectually Donne knew the difference between pathological melancholy and penitential mourning,[8] both his profane and holy sonnets show his continual psychological struggle to distinguish one from the other, and to shake off depression without female intervention. For this reason, Drummond's substitution of the Latin appeal *libera* for *illumina,* while an erroneous translation of the Lothian inscription, is nonetheless an alert reading of Donne's sacred love poetry where, as in his "Hymne" of 1619, he fretfully cries to Christ that thoughts of his dead wife cloud his prayer: "Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free my soule" (1.19). Moreover, *libera* fittingly echoes not only the deprecation closing the Lord's Prayer, *libera nos a malo,* but Cranmer's English Litany of 1544 with its translation of Luther's processional petitions calling on God to deliver his people from all evil—*Ab omni malo . . . ab omni peccato . . . Libera nos, Domine.*[9] The rhythmic cry of *libera* in these prayers is heard again in

Donne's insistent poetic complaints to God against the evils of melancholy. His most pressing "sinne of feare" was not despair, as he would have us believe in the closing stanza of "A Hymne to God the Father," but the fear supposedly exorcised in the final line—I fear no more. This fear is encoded in the Lothian inscription; it is the fear that he was alone in the darkness, a secret dread of life without the uplifting prayers and grace of women.

As Drummond exemplifies, the Lothian inscription was the subject of free but inspired translation that drew on a rich range of religious source material. Another of Donne's contemporaries, Richard Baddeley, secretary to Dr. Thomas Morton, also struggled to recall the Lothian portrait as a "picture . . . all envelloped with a darkish shadow, his face and feature hardly discernable, with this ejaculation and wish written therein: *Domine illumina tenebras meas.*" While not entirely accurate, he was closer to the actual source of the Lothian entreaty in the closing collect of Compline, and unerring in his Freudian choice of the word "ejaculation." Yet John Bryson, the twentieth-century critic who researched these eye-witness accounts and authenticated the Lothian portrait as a lost painting of Donne, attributed the Latin passage to the third collect of Anglican Evensong. It was left to Louis Martz, a decade later in 1969, to confirm that the petition can be traced to the medieval Catholic office of Compline in the *Sarum Breviarium*, later translated into English by Cranmer to become the closing prayer of Evensong in the *Book of Common Prayer* (n.4, 192).

While the Lothian inscription paraphrased Latin Compline, it is interesting that it should also call Evensong to mind. The fact that this happened with comparative ease suggests how accustomed Donne and his fellow countrymen were to pivoting in thought between a traditional and reformed liturgy and translating sacred words simultaneously into pre-Reformation Latin and Anglican English. If this translation insisted on the interplay, rather than the breach, between the religious present and past, then the model for such a creative exchange was Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer.* Cranmer frankly admitted that he took great liberties as a translator,[10] liberties that also characterize Donne's Lothian legend and the spirited efforts to cite and transcribe its source. Indeed

Cranmer's vernacular reform of the Latin liturgy has been acclaimed for its "bold handling of traditional forms, notably by abbreviation and conflation; borrowing from different portions of the Sarum rite; insertion of Reformed elements into the traditional framework; and occasional recourse to a totally unexpected source" (Cuming, *A History,* 35-36). However, what distinguishes Cranmer from earlier religious translators was his genius at what we now might call transliteration. He wrote plain, pithy English that preserved the spirit and style of the original Latin and conveyed the beauty and solemnity of the source in the Sarum liturgy (Mack, Cuming, *Language and the Worship of the Church,* 102-3, 110-11).

A flourishing critical debate has focused on the question of whether, as P.M. Oliver has succinctly remarked, Donne was "protestantising the Roman, or romanising the Protestant" in his religious writing.[11] For Raymond-Jean Frontain this is an "unresolvable" issue,[12] and Donne's *Holy Sonnets* are manifestos of indeterminacy, internalizing the divisions tearing Christendom apart yet dramatizing the psychic struggle for religious reconciliation. Robert Young sees a deep-seated 'ecumenical' impulse at work in Donne's religious verse and reads it as a "poetic encounter with God" that drew "upon a number of Christian resources—Catholic and Protestant, Medieval and Renaissance."[13] This same desire to integrate a wide range of past and present religious sources inspired the *Book of Common Prayer.* It led Cranmer to borrow material not only from a primary sources like the Sarum liturgy but the Catholic breviary revised in 1535 by Cardinal Quinones, reformed services produced by continental Protestants like Luther and Bucer, as well as the first English translations of the Primer, Psalter and Bible; and to produce "a mosaic" of striking phrases from his memory of lesser sources such as the Hereford Missal, the Liturgy of St Basil, and St Thomas Aquinas.[14]

Behind the eclectic history of the *Book of Common Prayer* lies a vigorous historical debate over the role that Cranmer's work played in Anglican continuity and discontinuity with inveterate Catholic piety.[15] In his first prayer-book of 1549, Cranmer attempted to navigate a middle course between radical reformers who wanted the demystification

of the mass and conservatives who remained devoted to such traditional religious practices as the divine office. He reduced the daily cycle of seven day hours and an eighth night office of prayer to one morning and evening service of Matins and Evensong. His intention was to create an Anglican liturgy that would be a "reformist-Catholic statement of what all had in common" (Cuming, *A History,* 57); but, initially, the prayer-book polarized the English church. Radical reformers vilified the work for preserving the form and intention of old observances and so allowing "church papists" to disguise their devotion to the outlawed Roman mass. (Maltby, 12-15, Cuming, *A History,* 71). Conservatives, however, feared that while the prayer-book preserved the semblance of such venerable practices as the liturgical hours of prayer, it removed the symbolic center of this great prayer wheel. This was the medieval understanding of the mass as a holy and real sacrifice that sacramentally evoked Christ's bodily presence in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Indeed as Dennis Flynn has reminded us,[16] Donne's forebear, William Rastell, went into exile rather than accept the *Book of Common Prayer* as a replacement for the institution of the Catholic sacraments. Cranmer carefully pared away at the sense of sacrificial mystery in his Order of Holy Communion and substituted the bloodless concept of a service of remembrance, and corporate sacrifice of self in praise and thanksgiving, for the mass's sacrosanct belief in the continuous and ever-present reenactment of Christ's offering on the Cross. In so doing, he demystified the Eucharist of the transformative power that lay at the core of Catholic sacramental worship.

The historian Eamon Duffy argues that the second Edwardine *Book of Common Prayer* was a prescriptive instrument in dismantling the remains of the Catholic ritual infrastructure and that the prayer-book of 1552 made iconoclasm, not the Eucharist, "the central sacrament" of Protestantism.[17] In fact, behind Cranmer's stringent reforms lay a noble intention which was to encourage weekly and even daily celebration of the Eucharist and so dispel the medieval awe of Holy Communion as a mystery to be reverently contemplated from afar and to be received only, as Donne says in a *Holy Sonnet,* on "my best dayes, when I shake with feare" (180, 1.14).[18] In order to promote more frequent attendance

at Holy Communion and turn men from "gazers and looker on them that do communicate" into "partakers of the same (them)selves" (Booty, 256), Cranmer strengthened the penitential introduction to his service. Yet his excoriating reminder that those who receive communion unworthily are "guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour" and "eat and drink (their) own damnation" (Booty, 258) was a formidable psychological prohibition, leading Donne to confess in despair that "I have sinn'd, and sinn'd" and so "crucifie" Christ daily (HS 168, ll.3, 8). As John Booty has argued (375), without the medieval sacrament of Penance to relieve the incapacitating sense of sinful weakness and unworthiness, infrequent communion became the rule—not, as Cranmer intended, the exception—and one consequence was that the focus of public worship began to shift to the non-sacramental morning and evening service.[19] In his revised prayer-book of 1552, Cranmer solemnly bound all priests and deacons to say Morning and Evening Prayer each day. They were instructed to toll the parish church bell that reverberates so memorably but also ominously in Donne's writing. It summoned the laity to attend these services, hear God's word, and be molded into "people of the book" (Maltby, 17, Booty, 17). Day in and day out, both English clergy and laity were called to participate in the daily rhythm of Matins and Evensong with its echoing song of past hours. Eamon Duffy has suggested how Donne's generation born in the 1570's was formed by the *Book of Common Prayer* as "Cranmer's sombrely magnificent prose, read week by week, entered and possessed their minds, and became the fabric of their prayer, the utterance of their most solemn and their most vulnerable moments" (593). A half a century later, those who knew Donne as the Dean of St. Paul's and beheld the Lothian portrait were more likely to translate its Latin inscription into an English statement of loyalty to prayer-book Protestantism than read it as a tell-tale fragment of survivalist Catholicism.[20]

The Lothian inscription was designed to make an impact, not only because of the ways it could be read, but how it was intended to be seen—circling Donne's head like a nimbus. The Lothian portrait gave a preview of what was soon to appear in his *Songs and Sonets* with "The Canonization" revealing a new order of saint to the waiting world. This

is a saint who conspicuously stages his own martyrdom in the middle of the poem and then proclaims that he and his sacrificial partner are *"Canoniz'd* for Love" (1.36). Knowing Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Cranmer's fate, he imagines that he too will be persecuted, burned at the stake and included among the ashes of the great—all on account of his own provocative revision of holy communion. Cranmer's prayer-book efforts to redefine the theology of the sacrifice in the old Latin mass would brand this great reformer a heretic under Mary Tudor. Donne's speaker reforms the Roman canon of the mass and then blasphemously reinstates its doctrinal belief in the transubstantiation where the work of human hands sacramentally becomes divine. He offers up an unconsecrated prayer of consecration: "Wee dye and rise the same, and prove/ Mysterious by this love" (ll. 26-27). Cranmer took the doctrinal position that the body of Christ is figuratively rather than corporally present in Holy Communion; and this same figurative understanding of the Body and Blood lies veiled behind the controlling metaphor of Donne's offertory prayer. Cranmer ordained that the center of attention in his Order of Holy Communion should shift towards the oblation of the worshippers who "offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice."[21] The congregation who are exhorted to draw near and gather round for Donne's new communion (Booty, 259) get a more "lively sacrifice" than they bargain for as they find themselves observing the mystery of sex performed on the Lord's table. In place of Cranmer's pale corporate offering of the faithful, the lovers of "The Canonization" celebrate the old mass's belief in a real, bodily sacrifice, but do so flagrante delicto, joining their naked flesh in carnal union with Christ. Cranmer's reformed liturgy castigates those who are "gazers and lookers on them that do communicate, and be no partakers of the same" (Booty, 256). Yet the opening prescription of his Order of Holy Communion stipulated that "so many as do intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion, shall signify their names to the curate overnight, or else in the morning, afore the beginning of Morning Prayer" (247). The flesh being weak, particularly in the night, we can imagine that many "gazers and lookers" were those who could not resist sexual intercourse in the

vigil before Communion. Donne's extraordinary Eucharist not only discourages sexual abstinence along with its lesser evil, sexual voyerism, but miraculously changes the substance of communion. It becomes an erotic act and gives a whole new meaning to Christ's words against those who condemned Mary Magdalene's sins of the flesh: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" *(Luke* 7: 47).

Legend has it that before his death, Cranmer had "drawen up a booke off praier an hundredth tymes more perfect then this that we now have" (Booty, 342). In his Holy Communion service, he had fashioned a prayer that echoed Donne's cry in the Lothian portrait: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" (Booty, 251). He could not know how cruelly he himself would fulfill that prayer on the pyre or that his 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* would be his lasting good work to the Anglican Church.[22] Cranmer merged the old night office of Matins and the first day hours of Lauds and Prime to create the new service of Matins or Morning Prayer, and fused the final day hours of Vespers and Compline into Evensong or Evening Prayer. Paradoxically, his synthesis diminished but also preserved the ancient cycle of daily prayer that once marked the sacred times of the day. For even before the first *Book of Common Prayer* appeared in 1549, the Divine Office was beginning to fall into disuse in the Catholic Church.[23]

A reader of "The Canonization" can begin to appreciate why the Divine Office, with its demanding schedule of worship and continual interruptions to work and sleep patterns, was dying out among the laity. As we have seen, the lovers in this poem self-consciously model their erotic life on the order of holy communion; but their nonstop sex, in turn, parodies the unceasing prayer cycle of the divine office that once centered on the celebration of the mass. Indeed the lovers evoke awe in "The Canonization," especially among Christian backsliders, on account of their remarkable sexual stamina and devotion. "Contemplate, what you will, approve,/ So you will let me love" (ll. 8-9). However their renewed passion for the old liturgical hours of prayer causes offence as well as gasps of admiration. For they practise their

time-consuming rites against the backdrop of the incessant business and busyness, noise and commotion, conflicts and worries that we now recognize as modern urban life in action. This frenetic culture of the city would hasten the demise of the divine office. The explosion of anger that rips open "The Canonization"—"For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love"—is not the impiety of the hardened urban dweller who habitually takes God's name in vain, but a vain entreaty for the city to cultivate the silence that will allow God's word to be heard. While the divine office ordered the corporate and public worship of the Church, it also created private space for the quiet and intimate time that the amorous speaker craves in "The Canonization." Yet, in the end, their exalted living experiment is a failure. With the elimination of explicit prayers for the dead from the 1552 prayer-book funeral rite (Duffy, 475), they can only hope to be remembered in this poem: "wee can dye by it, if not live by love,/ And if unfit for tombes and hearse/ Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse" (ll. 28-30). However, these lines do not only register a new fear that no one will remember the dead by name in their prayers any more, but that the prayers themselves, once said round the clock in the daily office, were no longer available to give sacred and symbolic meaning to ordinary Christian life.

Both the legend "fit (only) for verse" in "The Canonization" and the legend encircling Donne's head in the Lothian portrait are relics of a Catholic liturgy that sanctioned perpetual prayer and sacrifice. The two legends incorporate fragments of this older worship and convey a melancholy awareness of its passing. However, as is already evident, though he mourned the passing of time-honoured prayers, Donne saw the poetic opportunity to reinvent the liturgy of the hours by fashioning it around the words and rituals of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* (Duffy, 589). The Lothian portrait depicts a young man who was only too familiar with mourning and melancholy, who fell back on the old mid-evening office of Compline that dignified his anticipation of lovemaking at night and release from depression in sleep;[24] and who went on in his poetry to turn this darkness into an Evensong. *Illumina tenebras nostras Domina.*

Donne's darkest hour was the death of his wife Anne in 1617. "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day" is generally thought to have been written in deep mourning at the end of that same year and to mark her passing. It projects a state of spiritual desolation so stark that the speaker's inner world scans like a barren lunar waste. The fourth stanza of this poem is especially harrowing to read with its suggestion that Donne is incoherent with grief and that words, the great comfort of his life, utterly fail him. "Were I a man, that I were one,/ I needs must know; I should preferre,/ If I were any beast,/ Some ends, some means" (ll. 30-33). In the fifth and final stanza of "A nocturnall" his speaker begins to get a grip on his emotions and to formulate the first words of prayer that are heard in this poem: "Let mee prepare towards her, and let me mee call/ This houre her Vigill, and her Eve" (ll.43-44), with 'prepare' used to suggest that the speaker hopes his devotion will make him fit to join his wife in heaven. Yet 'prepare' preserves the uncertainty of this communion because one cannot be certain whether Donne was alluding to the expectant prayers of preparation which a Catholic would recite in his Sarum missal at the start of the old Latin mass or to the Anglican Ante-Communion that Cranmer had added as "penitential preparation for the occasional Holy Communion" (Booty, 378). As "The Canonization" has shown, the penitential scruples built into the first part of Cranmer' s service made many in the congregation feel they could only be longing "gazers and lookers" and not "partakers" in communion; and indeed Cranmer devised the Ante-Communion so that it could stand alone as the corporate worship of the Church Militant, should there be embarrassingly few up to the rigours of holy communion (Booty, 267; Harper, 287). One unforeseen consequence of Cranmer's demanding reforms was that Evensong became the service that completed the unfinished business of communion, giving the Anglican people of God the comfort they were not always worthy to receive in the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and sending them off in "peace," "rest and quietness" into the night (Booty, 259, 64). Donne was in need of the peace of Evensong as he struggled to come to terms with the death of his wife and to prepare for a long ante-communion,

with years of prayer and penitence stretching ahead before he could hope to be reunited with Anne in the afterlife.

A.B. Chambers has drawn attention to the fact that the last line of the poem—"Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is"—parallels the first line, and rearranges the words in the opening sentence—"Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes." He perceptively focuses on the word that illumines the darkness of "A nocturnall" when he remarks: "present in the last line but not the first is a short word of vast significance. The word is 'deep,' and what it signals is a moment in time so close to being no time at all that the profundity of its depth could not have been sounded without the layered linearity of speech" (122). This word points to the "deep" substructure buried in "A nocturnall," and that is the prayer services celebrating the rotation of the day. This daily prayer wheel was instrumental in creating what Frances Malpezzi has described as "the circularity and reversibility of sacred time" ever "present and accessible to every believer."[25] Cranmer reduced the circumference of this circle yet at the same time memorialized its greatness in the language and rhythms of his prayer-book. The very reversibility of the liturgy of the hours afforded Donne the scope to play Cranmer's smaller cycle of Matins and Evensong off against the eight office prayer cycle of the traditional church, in the same way that he concurrently marks the revolving of a day and a year in his poem. The naming of this cyclic liturgy in the closing stanza of the poem will finally bring some consolation to the grief-stricken speaker through its rhythmic movement backwards and forwards in time, and away from the intolerable present of the human and temporal order.

It is likely, as Shawcross notes (402), that Donne did not conceive the full title of this poem. However, his final rubric—"let mee call/This houre her Vigill, and her Eve" (ll. 43-44)—underscores the fact that his poem is a night office and makes it highly probable that he wished it to be known as "A nocturnall." Prior to Cranmer's reforms, the night office of Matins was also called Vigils or Nocturns and was held around midnight—the sacred hour that opens and closes the poem (Harper 74, 86). In the traditional cycle, Matins was the great and arduous night

office that taxed the strength of the faithful and became an endurance exercise in sacrificial prayer. It was followed by "the exquisite daybreak office of Lauds, pure praise."[26] Donne's poem depicts a speaker who is too deadened by loss to pray unceasingly through the endless vigil of the night; who can only go through the motions of using the formal terms of prayer; and who in his bereavement cannot dredge up the words of praise implicit in Lauds. Instead the poem moves ever deeper into the darkness of a night office frozen in time where the speaker is "re-begot/ Of absence, darkness, death; things which are not" (ll. 17-18). This darkness only begins to lift in the final stanza of the poem. Though the opening line of this stanza appears to be the ultimate statement of despair, "But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew" (1.37), it signals a sudden and mysterious lifting of mood. In the next lines the speaker will find the grace to invoke other lovers "for whose sake, the lesser Sunne/At this time to the Goat is runne" (ll. 38-39). He will exhort them, like the minister of Holy Communion, to love one another and to 'do this in remembrance of me.' "Enjoy your summer all;/ Since shee enjoyes her long nights festival,/ Let mee prepare towards her" (ll. 41-43).

If spiritual recovery stirs in these lines with the repeated use of the word "enjoy," it occurs because Donne has set not one but two liturgical cycles in motion. With the advent of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* and conflation of the canonical hours, the traditional cycle alluded to in "A nocturnall" became a thing of the past like Donne's wife, a "dead thing" like him in his grief. Yet in sacred time, what goes around comes around. Cranmer's reformed services effectively transfigured the old night office of Matins, Vigils or Nocturns by merging it with Lauds and Prime to create a new day office known as Matins or Morning Prayer[27] and said with the rising of the sun. This office expresses the renewal of belief in Christ, his victory over "the sharpness of death" (Booty, 54), and his promise of the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. The speaker may cry out that "I am None; nor will my Sunne renew," but he has set in motion a prayer cycle that pivots back and forth between a Catholic and Anglican liturgy—just as his Lothian inscription turns on Compline and Evensong—and

that effectively demonstrates that in sacred time, nothing or no one can ever be entirely lost. Furthermore, the psalms that featured importantly in both the traditional hours and Cranmer's morning and evening prayers teach that pain can be the raw material of pure praise and possibility.[28] Indeed John Booty points out that the memorable rhythm of the prayer-book is set by the tempo of the psalms with their "penitence rising to praise, praise falling back into penitence and then rising again to praise" to form "the rhythm of the Christian life" (379). It can be difficult, however, for those who are laid low by chronic melancholy, mourning or guilt to raise themselves from their bed of penitence to sing a song of praise. What is heard at the end of "A nocturnall" is only faint praise, or perhaps the possibility of "penitence rising to praise." It opens up for the speaker when he has exhausted his pain, so that he has none left, and sends his night office with its prayer for death ("I am every dead thing," l. 12) and for the dead ("I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)/ Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown," ll.28-29) forth into the darkness in search of morning—or Anne's perpetual light.

An earlier religious work such as *La Corona* shows that Donne habitually found some relief from his "low devout melancholie" by weaving intricate prayer circles into his poems. As we have seen in "A nocturnall," these were derived from both traditional and reformed practices; and they helped to order and regulate powerful feelings stirred during difficult rites of passage. However, Donne's poetry also confirms the historiographical view that Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* had begun to supersede earlier liturgies and to capture the literary as well as religious imagination of the English, even those who remained Catholic in sympathy (Maltby, 2-3, 17, 29-30; Duffy, 502-03, 593). Donne's generation, and many generations of English Christians to come, would be bound together by a common love for the prayer-book. As John Booty has noted, they were "continuously exposed to the weekly sequence of Matins, Litany, Ante Communion, and Evensong" (327), and would come, as a result, to know many passages by heart. The General Confession devised for both Matins and Evensong was especially cherished; and one reason for this may be its

marked contrast with the confession in the Order of Holy Communion. When he added a penitential opening to Morning and Evening Prayer in 1552, Cranmer adopted a tone of tender admonishment that is absent from the confession of the communicants he instructed to "bewail (their) manifold sins and wickedness . . . provoking most justly (God's) wrath and indignation" (259). In Matins and Evensong sinners are called to melodious contrition:

> Almighty and most merciful Father. We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. (Booty, 50-51)

Donne not only wrote his poetry against the background of this liturgy,[29] but let the beauty of this passage sweep through some of his most memorable verse. One poem that brings its petitions strongly to mind is "A Hymne to God the Father." Walton remarks that Donne's attachment to this particular hymn was so pronounced that he had it set to "a most grave and solemn tune and . . . often sung by the choristers of St. Paul's Church in his own hearing, especially at the evening service" (263). In this signature poem Donne does not ask for forgiveness; but unorthodox as it may sound for an Anglican priest at Evensong, he questions whether an "Almighty and most merciful Father" is capable of forgiving him at all: "Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne,/ Which is my sin, though it were done before?/ Wilt thou forgive those sinnes through which I runne,/ And do them still: though still I do deplore?" (ll. 1-4). His poem begins with a dramatic statement of original sin and encapsulates its rapid course through human history as it infects one verse line after another. In a depressing reprise of Augustinian theology, this sin is likened to a sexually transmitted disease passed on from husband to wife, from parent to child, and from one generation to the next. The only thing that can

counter its inexorable momentum is the power of unceasing prayer. This is what makes Donne's stanzaic refrain, "When thou hast done, thou hast not done,/ For, I have more," such a tour de force. His flagrant pun not only names him and his wife and brings their sins of the flesh alive, but plays on the gentle confession of Evensong—"we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." No poet was more familiar with the slippery devices and desires of the heart or knew better how to "wallow" in guilt and transgression in his verse. He also liked to have his cake and eat it. Even as he owns up to the fact that his life has been an old, familiar round of sin, we can hear him plea bargaining with God, like the Wyf of Bath,—"Allas!, allas! That evere love was synne!" And of course, he is right. Mary Magdalene was living proof that the greatest sinners could be the greatest lovers and most dearly loved by God. The Church, in her wisdom, made Matins the longest office because much sin is committed at night (Godden, 62); and Donne's Hymn depicts lovemaking as the number one sin of the night. The prayers of these hours were offered up in reparation and in faith that love transformed sin. Indeed, Donne's line of defense with the Almighty is that all his sin stems from love; and it is love that not only set him turning against God but will ultimately assure his final conversion and rest. As he warms to his argument, he cannot resist paraphrasing the words of the General Confession and throwing them back in God's face: "when thou hast done, thou hast not done,/ For, I have more" (11.5-6). These lines can be read not only as a contrite acknowledgement that his clandestine courtship, elopement and uxorious love for Anne are the things Donne has done which he ought not to have done, but far more audaciously, an unrepentant insistence that God himself needs to confess to the fact that He has left undone those things which he ought to have done—which are, presumably, to absolve, save, and even exonerate Donne of all wrong in the name of love.

In the General Confession, the acknowledgement that "we have done those things which we ought not to have done" concludes with the terse statement "and there is no health in us." This line recurs almost

verbatim as the brusque lament of Donne's "First Anniversarie": "There is no health" (l.91). In the opening Order for both Matins and Evensong, this blunt remark is a response to the minister's previous invitation: "I pray and beseech you, as many as be here present, to accompany me with a pure heart and humble voice, unto the throne of the heavenly grace" (50). Yet it can be harder at Evensong than at Matins to respond to these words with eyes of faith. For this service takes place as darkness draws nigh, when the light is fading, the spirit wanes, and hope can be severely tested. Indeed in one of his sermons, Donne argued that metaphorically speaking, "all Gods deliverances are in the morning, because there is a perpetuall night, and an invincible darknesse upon us, till he deliver us" *(Sermons, 5:* 282). Donne invites the reader to engage in an act of imaginative contemplation and see "The First Anniversarie" as an Evensong said on a "last long night" (l.69) when "shee which did inanimate and fill/ the world be gone" (ll. 68-69). As in Donne's Lothian portrait, the world is sketched in semi-darkness; it is fitfully illuminated by the "glimmering light" of Elizabeth's spirit (1.70) and "a faint weake love of vertue and of good/reflect(ed) from her" (ll.71-72); and it must be content with half-life in "the twi-light of (Elizabeth's) memory" (1.74).

Richard Hooker sternly reminded the people of the book that "virtue and godliness of life are required at the hands of the minister of God," that God himself "requireth the lifting up of pure hands in prayer," and that his priests should therefore "be evermore clothed with righteousness, that thy saints may thereby with more devotion rejoice and sing" (110). If we imagine "The First Anniversarie" as addressed to Christians assembled at Evensong and about to make their General Confession, then Elizabeth Drury is uniquely qualified to lift up their hearts, minds and voices. As a young virgin she possessed the "pure heart," "pure hands," and "humble voice" necessary to approach in meekness "the throne of the heavenly voice." Death has sealed her virginity and saved her from those fatal nights where weaker mortals like Donne and his wife cry out in pleasure and "kille our selves, to propagate our kinde" (1.110). There was also symbolic capital to be made of the fact that her death in December 1610 fell near the Catholic

feast of the Immaculate Conception on the 8th and popular holy day of St Lucy on the 13th—as if the female saints in heaven, silenced in Cranmer's Litany and repudiated at the end of the "The Second Anniversary" (ll. 511-13), wished her to take over their role as *domina* and illuminate the darkness. Once more, Donne returns to his characteristic stance in the Lothian portrait, and looks to Elizabeth for inspiration when all other light fails in the world. *Illumina tenebras nostras Domina.*

Hooker argued that the harmony of church music could soothe the melancholy and despair that we see on show in the Lothian portrait and gathering intensity again in the *Anniversary* poems (146). Although the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* made little provision for music, choral music began to be heard at Matins and Evensong in the reign of Elizabeth (Harper, 184-86). Hooker enthusiastically endorsed this practice, asserting that the "heavenly acclamations, exultations, provocations, petitions, songs of comfort, psalms of praise and thanksgiving" played daily at the prayer-book services "in the hearing of God himself, and in the presence of his holy Angels" (149) could inspire concord and love between the pastor and his people. When "The First Anniversarie" opens, the "rich soule" of the young female subject is already "a part both of the Quire, and Song"; that is to say she has joined the heavenly choir that celebrates and sings itself in an endless evensong before the throne of God (ll.1, 10). In effect, Donne depicts her as surpassing Hooker's minister "when he lifteth up his voice like a trumpet to proclaim unto them the laws of God" (149). Donne too preached that the minister was the trumpet that called the congregation "to hearken to God in his word, and to speak to God in our prayers"; and indeed Cranmer instructed the minister to speak in a loud voice at Morning and Evening Prayer (49). But Donne went further than this, rhapsodizing the minister as music to the ears of his congregation—"*musicum carmen,* musick and harmony in his manner," "a love-song . . . in proposing the love of God to man" and in restoring repose to the soul and delight in God *(Sermons,* 2:166-67, 169-70). At the end of the *Anniversary* poems, he and Elizabeth split the honors. She is designated "the Proclamation" and he becomes "the Trumpet, at whose voice

the people came" (ll. 527-28). If she becomes the word that he preaches and proclaims or the song of songs that he trumpets aloud, the question is what words and sounds does she form. In "The Second Anniversary" Donne declares that Elizabeth Drury is an open book and that "we understand/ Her by her sight, her pure and eloquent blood/ Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinckly wrought,/ That one might almost say, her bodie thought" (ll. 243-46). But the question remains how might she be read? Earlier critics have perceived her as the *Logos,* Christ, the Word made Flesh.[30] But an Anglican congregation accustomed to Evensong might more circumspectly have seen Elizabeth Drury as the word of the prayer-book. As Judith Maltby reminds us, "English conformists did not believe that the Prayer Book was the 'word of God' . . . . The belief among those who did conform was that when they worshipped according to the lawful liturgy, they were worshipping God" (4). Indeed Elizabeth Drury embodies the most highly praised features of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* which are its clear, simple, spare, yet eloquent words of worship rising up to God. Not least, she is a fascinating reminder that Cranmer's prayer-book did not only replace but **displace** the numinous symbolism of the past. This utterly mysterious nonentity illustrates how the psychic energy of traditional religion could be transferred from one sacred 'idea' to another that originally had little inherent importance, though the poet would artfully claim in his "First Anniversarie" that Elizabeth was the *"first* originall/ Of all faire copies" (ll. 227-28). In the same way, Eamon Duffy argued that though "much reduced in scope, depth, and coherence," medieval piety "re-formed itself around the rituals and words of the prayer-book" (589). For the 'people of the book' who bowed their heads to receive the Absolution of Evensong, Elizabeth Drury was an assurance that whatever had gone before or forever, "the rest of our life hereafter, may be pure and holy: so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy: through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Booty, 51).

The canticles of joy that follow in the Order of Evensong and alternate with the Psalms and two Lessons—the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*—are a moving reminder that the people of God cannot live without hope. They remember His promises, even to forefathers and

mothers who practiced old or obsolete forms of worship. They believe that He will keep his covenant "throughout all generations" because He has regard for "the lowliness of his handmaiden"; and they scan the faces of all the people they encounter, as Simeon did, for the signs of salvation and for "a light to lighten the Gentiles" (Booty, 61-63). When he became an Anglican divine, Donne could not officially invoke Our Lady as the sacred prototype of the *Domina* in the Lothian portrait or call upon her as mediatrix in the public prayers of his congregation.[31] However, in Evensong he could still hear her voice rising in the joyful canticle of the *Magnificat,* assuring him that "all generations shall call me blessed." A profane version of his lifelong search for a blessed lady to light his fire may have led Donne, as Walton suggests, to commit "the remarkable error of his life" (263) and risk all in a secret marriage to Anne More. Evensong could then have provided a ritual release for other strong, if less noble feelings. As the poet languished at Pyrford, not far from Sir George More's seat at Loseley Park, and as he observed what Bald called the "almost princely scale" on which his father-in-law lived (129), it might have given him bitter satisfaction to read Evensong's *Magnificat* Canticle: "He hath scattered the proud, in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat." Did he read there his own fate? Or did he imagine the fate of those who had opposed his marriage to Anne More and left him to languish in darkness during the prime of life, probing "the devices and desires" of the heart in his poetry and inventing his moody evensongs?

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Notes

1. Walton's "Life of Dr. John Donne" (1675) is quoted in *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry,* ed. Alexander Witherspoon & Frank Warnke, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 263. See John Carey's comment in *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber, 1981), 93.

2. John Bryson, "Lost Portrait of Donne," *The Times,* 13 October 1959, 13.

3. See Kate Frost's rich study of this portrait and her discussion of its tradition of melancholy, "The Lothian Portrait: A Prologomenon," *John Donne Journal* 15 (1996): 96-98.

4. See the history of these wills in R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 501, 523-24; W. Milgate, "Dr. Donne's Art Gallery," *Notes and Queries* 194 (1949): 318-19; and Louis Martz, *The Wit of Love: Donne, Crashaw, Carew, Marvell* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 20-23 and n. 9 on 192-93. According to Bryson, Richard Baddeley probably saw the Lothian portrait sometime between 1606-8 when he and Donne both worked for Dr. Thomas Morton. William Drummond of Hawthornden could have seen the painting when Donne was alive or after he passed it on to Robert Ker in his will. Ker was a friend of both Donne and Drummond.

5. I am quoting the second collect at Evening Prayer and refer parenthetically throughout this essay to John E. Booty's edition of *The Book of Common Prayer (1559): The Elizabethan Prayer Book,* Folger Shakespeare Library (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1976), 64.

6. I cite Donne's poetry parenthetically in the text and refer to John T. Shawcross's edition of *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967). I was inspired by Jeffrey Johnson's discussion of this Hymn and discourse on the subject of prayer in "Wrestling with God: John Donne at Prayer" in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross,* ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain & Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995), 306-23.

7. See Peter Mack's "Rhetoric and Liturgy," *Language and the Worship of the Church,* ed. David Jasper (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 87.

8. See "'A true transubstantiation': Donne, Self-Love, and the Passion," *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* 164.

9. Quoted from Geoffrey J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy,* 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 37.

10. See Geoffrey J. Cuming, "Thomas Cranmer, Translator and Creative Writer," *Language and the Worship of the Church,* 110-12, 116.

11. P.M. Oliver, *Donne 's Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (London: Longman, 1997), 89.

12. See Frontain's "Introduction: 'Make all this All': The Religious Operations of John Donne's Imagination," *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* 19-20.

13. R. V. Young, "Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Theology of Grace," *'Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse': The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric,* ed. Claude J. Summers & Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1987), 24, 38.

14. See Cuming, *Language and the Worship of the Church,* 110-11, 118; Cuming, *A History,* 30-31, 43; John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century,* reprint (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 167; and A. B. Chambers, *Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1992), xi-xii.

15. See Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 12.

16. Dennis Flynn, "A Biographical Prolusion to Study of Donne's Religious Imagination," *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* 31.

17. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 467-80.

18. See Cuming, *A History,* 76, 81 on Cranmer's intentions when he strengthened the penitential element in the prayer book and Booty's excellent discussion of the unintentional effects in his "History of the 1559 Book of Common Prayer," 357, 373-75.

19. See the discussions of Maltby, 4; John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 27-34; Geoffrey J. Cuming, "The Office in the Anglican Communion," *The Study of Liturgy,* ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold S.J. & Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1993), 444; Cuming, *A History,* 40-42, 76-8 1; Mack, *Language and the Worship of the Church,* 91.

20. In his defense of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Book V, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* Richard Hooker would reject the charge that "it hath ... too great affinity with the form of the church of Rome." See "Objections to our Form of Prayer," in Volume 2 of the 2 volume edition by Christopher Morris (London: Everyman's Library, 1968), 114.

21. See Booty's interesting discussion (369-70) of how with the shift of the altar table "from the sanctuary to the chancel where the people gathered around," the idea of communion also changed towards greater emphasis on the offering and participation of the faithful.

22. Booty reminds us on 347 that the Elizabethan *Book of Common Prayer* "is basically the 1552 Book, which in turn was a revision of the Prayer Book of 1549."

23. See J. D. Crichton, "The Office in the West: The Roman Rite from the Sixteenth Century," *The Study of Liturgy,* 433-34; Harper, 166; and Cuming, *A History,* 28.

24. See Harper's useful discussion on 74 of the probable timetable for the canonical hours in Northern Europe.

25. Frances Malpezzi, "Donne's Transcendent Imagination: The Divine Poems

as Hierophantic Experience," *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* 146.

26. Rumer Godden's fictional but well-documented account of the monastic life in the twentieth century of an abbey of Benedictine nuns, *In This House of Brede* (New York: Amereon Books, 1969), is especially insightful on the divine office. See her notes on the *Opus Dei*, 37 1-72.

27. Cranmer wanted Matins and Evensong known as Morning and Evening Prayer in his 1552 Prayer Book, but the old names, and the residual memory attached to them, remained in favour.

28. See Kathleen Norris, "The Paradox of the Psalms," *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 90-107 for another engrossing account of Benedictine liturgy and the psalms that are central to the liturgy of the hours.

29. Booty again memorably observes in his history on 327 that "John Donne, not only as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral but also as an Englishman continuously exposed to the weekly sequence of Matins, Litany, Ante Communion, and Evensong, preached sermons within the context of the prescribed services and wrote poems against the background of the liturgy."

30. See the comprehensive summary of critical views of Elizabeth Drury in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne,* gen. ed. Gary A. Stringer, Vol. 6: *The Anniversaries and The Epicedes and Obsequies,* ed. John R. Roberts (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), 293-317, especially 295 and critical commentary on the last lines of the *Anniversaries,* 535. See my own analysis of these poems and Elizabeth Drury's symbolic role in *Feminine Engendered Faith: John Donne and Richard Crashaw* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 78-105 which was not included in this *Variorum Edition.*

31. See my discussion of Madonna worship, its decline in Protestant culture and repercussions in Donne and Crashaw's religious poetry in *Feminine Engendered Faith.* See George Klawitter's briefer account in "John Donne's Attitude towards the Virgin Mary: The Public versus the Private Voice," *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* 122-40.

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