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The Alchemical Failure of John Donne's Holy Sonnets

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The range of John Donne's references to alchemy has been ably documented by scholars such as Edgar Hill Duncan, Joseph Mazzeo, and Stanton Linden.[1] Throughout his lyrics, elegies, verse letters, and sermons, Donne seems to express nearly all of the possible attitudes toward alchemy available to an educated person in the early seventeenth century. This range can be demonstrated with a few representative texts before turning to the Holy Sonnets, which represent a surprising combination of these attitudes.

In some poems, Donne sneers at alchemy as either an art of deception practiced by conniving charlatans or, at best, a hopeless pursuit on which honest but deluded scholars waste their own time, money, and learning. These two satirical views of alchemy—exemplified in the English tradition by works such as Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*—find expression in lyrics such as "The Sunne Rising," where Donne uses the very word

[1]Duncan, "Donne's Alchemical Figures," *English Literary History* 9.4 (Dec. 1942): 257–85; Mazzeo, "Notes on John Donne's Alchemical Imagery," *Isis* 48 (1957): 103–23; Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996). Duncan surveys explicit references to alchemical gold, transmutation, and other alchemical operations in over a dozen poems and verse epistles. Mazzeo does likewise, with more copious references to actual alchemical sources and particular attention to Donne's ambivalent attitude toward Paracelsus. Mazzeo is rare among scholars of Donne's alchemy in that he briefly mentions two of the Holy Sonnets. Linden's monograph is discussed later in this essay.

"alchemy" as shorthand for falseness and folly: "She'is all States, and all Princes, I, / Nothing else is. / Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this, / All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie" (ll. 21–24).[2] A less severe, but still mocking, tone is taken in "Loves Alchymie," where Donne alludes to alchemy as a process, like love, that will never reach its intended end and can offer only pleasant but haphazard by-products:

> And as no chymique yet th'Elixar got,
> But glorifies his pregnant pot,
> If by the way to him befall
> Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall,
> So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,
> But get a winter-seeming summers night. (ll. 7–12)

In stark contrast to these satirical treatments of alchemy, however, we find passages such as the following one from an undated sermon on Psalm 51:7 ("Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow"). Here Donne explicitly uses the technical language of alchemy to illustrate the psalmist's desire for permanent spiritual renewal:

> Therefore David who was metall tried seven times in the fire, and desired to be such gold as might be laid up in Gods Treasury, might consider, that in transmutation of metals, it is not enough to come to a calcination, or a liquefaction of the metall, (that must be done) nor to an Ablution, to sever drosse from pure, nor to a Transmutation, to make it a better metall, but there must be a Fixion, a settling thereof, so that it shall not evaporate into nothing, nor returne to his former nature. Therefore he saw that he needed not only a liquefaction, a melting into teares, nor only an Ablution, and a Transmutation, those he had by this purging and washing

[2]Whenever possible quotations of Donne's poetry come from *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, gen. ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995–). For poems not yet available in the *Variorum*, I quote from John T. Shawcross's *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

> . . . but he needed *Fixionem*, an establishment, which the comparison of Snow afforded not.[3]

This passage, often cited by scholars of Donne's alchemy, reveals several of Donne's attitudes and assumptions. Among these is the specific point that Donne is making in explicating Psalm 51—a point that will become quite important in the present investigation of the Holy Sonnets—the need for permanence, a "fixion." Several of the Holy Sonnets can be read as a desperate struggle for certainty, and in this passage Donne reads that struggle into the words of Psalm 51, where David prays to be washed "whiter than snow." What can be whiter than snow? Somewhat strangely, Donne interprets this excess whiteness not as a further degree of purity or luminosity, but as fixity. Even metal melts, but—in Donne's reading here—David wishes for a permafrost soul impervious to change.

More generally, however, this sermon passage reveals both Donne's own alchemical literacy and the kind of alchemical literacy he expected of his audience. To a modern reader, it might seem an odd or ill-conceived rhetorical choice for a preacher to use a defunct proto-scientific system such as alchemy to explain a serious spiritual truth—especially when that preacher has himself jeered at that very system in his earlier writings. We do well to remember, however, that alchemy was not nearly defunct while Donne was alive, and that its application to Christian spirituality flourished well past the mid-seventeenth century. In fact, a religious understanding of alchemy predates Christianity itself, and is often difficult to distinguish from any other understanding of it. From as far back as we can trace its origins,

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[3]"Preached upon the Penitential Psalms, on Psalm 51.7," Sermon No. 15 in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), vol. 5, p. 314. The date and place for this sermon are unknown. Potter and Simpson's remarks on it are disappointingly terse: "It deals with a single verse of the Fifty-first Psalm, and we can find no evidence to assign it to any particular year. It is a good example of its kind, but unfortunately we have no space to discuss it here" (p. 26). Luke Taylor does find space to discuss this sermon—and its connection to the Holy Sonnets—in *John Donne Journal* 34 (2015): 171–92. As of this writing, the text has not yet been published in the new Oxford edition of Donne's sermons.

alchemy had always been both a material and a spiritual practice—both "exoteric" and "esoteric" aspects.[4] Well into the Scientific Revolution, material and spiritual realities were not as easily separated as they are to us. Angels literally turned the spheres. Metals had souls. Modern readers unfamiliar with alchemy probably think of it simply in its exoteric vein, as the attempt to turn lead into gold. That kind of alchemist certainly did exist, as is attested both by the satirists' abiding attacks on them and by the conventional caution against that kind of alchemy in the writings of serious alchemists themselves.[5] The alchemical literature that has come down to us, however—and that had already come down to Donne—more typically blends the physical and spiritual aspects of the art.

What is also clear in both the love poetry and in this sermon excerpt is Donne's assumption that a general audience would be

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[4]E.J. Holmyard, like many other historians, uses the terms "exoteric" and "esoteric" to distinguish these two aspects of alchemy in his seminal history of the art, *Alchemy* (New York: Dover, 1990; originally published 1957), pp. 15ff. See also Linden, *Darke Hieroglypicks,* pp. 7–8.

[5]The influential English alchemist Thomas Norton, for instance, begins his *Ordinall of Alchemy* by observing that most of those who pursue alchemy have done so out of simple greed—and therefore have no hope of being true alchemists:

> Good Men and Bad, even Numberlesse,
> (The latter, but without successe)
> Desire the Art: But still (Alas!)
> They are given to Avarice,
> That of a Million, hardly three
> Were ere Ordained for Alchimy.

Thomas Norton, *The Ordinall of Alchimy*, sig. C2. Written in 1477, the *Ordinall* is the first of several alchemical texts anthologized by Elias Ashmole in his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum: Containing severall poeticall pieces of our famous English philosophers, who have written the hermetique mysteries in their owne ancient language* (London: J. Grismond, 1652), sigs. C1–Q1v. There is also an early manuscript at the British Library (Additional MS 10302). See *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, ed. John Reidy (London: Early English Text Society, 1975). Holmyard includes several pages on Norton and the *Ordinall* in his ninth chapter, "Some English Alchemists," pp. 189–99.

familiar with alchemy. This is especially apparent in the sermon, which was likely not preached to a coterie audience of fellow wits and nerds, but to a wider segment of the population.[6] Donne uses terms like "calcination" and "ablution" with little to no explanation, in the same way that a twenty-first century preacher might use the terms "greenhouse gas" or "tectonic shift" without elaboration. Similarly, the love poems refer to alchemy without explaining it. Those poems are not really about alchemy; they use alchemy in passing to make their points about love, drawing on knowledge and connotations that readers already have. Donne simply assumes alchemical literacy in his readers.

Between the love poems and the sermons—both chronologically and in terms of their handling of alchemy—are other poems which similarly assume an alchemically literate reader. In "A nocturnal upon S. Lucies day," for instance, Donne reverses the alchemical concept of the fifth element when he says that love has wrought in him "a quintessence even from nothingnesse" (l. 15). In alchemical terms, this is an oxymoron: the quintessence is, by definition, a substance that combines all of the potential properties of matter in perfect proportion. In this sense, it is everything, not "nothingnesse," and Donne's handling of the concept here is novel and startling—provided his reader comes to the line with a traditional alchemical understanding of the fifth element.[7]

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[6]Because we do not know the date, place, or audience of the sermon on Psalm 51:7, it would be unwise to generalize on Donne's audience based on this text alone. Peter McCullough cautions against this kind of generalization, observing that Donne preached for a variety of audiences in a variety of venues ("Donne as Preacher" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006], p. 168), and it is generally accepted that many of Donne's poems were written for a select coterie audience. See especially Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne: Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). It seems reasonable to guess, however, that the audience of the sermon was broader than the audience of the Holy Sonnets.

[7]Harry Wingfield Peter discusses the entire poem as exemplifying the intitial *nigredo* stage in the alchemical process in "Donne's 'Nocturnall' and the *Nigredo*," *Thoth* 9 (1968): 48–57. A thorough alchemical discussion of the poem is offered by Thomas W. Hayes, "Alchemical Imagery in John Donne's

In still other poems, in fact, Donne leaves the alchemical content so implicit that it is quite easy for modern readers to overlook it. The famous "stiffe twin compasses" in "A Valediction forbidding mourning," for instance, are strongly suggestive of the alchemical cipher for gold—a circle with a dot in its center—so that when Donne suggests that he and his wife will be like "gold to ayery thinnesse beate," an alchemically literate reader can easily picture the compasses as having drawn this perfect, airy gold.[8]

In short, throughout Donne's career, his uses of alchemy included both sharp satire and sincere spiritual applications. His own knowledge of alchemy was at least wide enough to embrace both its exoteric and its esoteric aspects, and his confidence in the alchemical literacy of his audience enabled Donne to wittily manipulate the central ideas of alchemy for different rhetorical purposes. None of this should surprise anyone who has spent much time with Donne. It is exactly what we would expect when a writer with a curious, wide-ranging, and somewhat restless mind encounters a phenomenon as old and broad as the art of alchemy—an art with deep spiritual resonance and nearly boundless allegorical and metaphorical potential.[9] What is

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'A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day,'" *Ambix* 24 (1977): 55–62. W.A. Murray analyzes the "Nocturnal" and "Loves Alchymie" with an eye toward the alchemical theories of Paracelsus in his article "Donne and Paracelsus: An Essay in Interpretation," *Review of English Studies* 25 (1949): 115–23.

[8]See Edgar Hill Duncan, "Donne's Alchemical Figures," *English Literary History* 9.4 (Dec. 1942): 257–85. Duncan explains an implict alchemical context for that poem, a point that is made at much greater length by Eugene R. Cunnar, "Donne's 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' and the Golden Compasses of Alchemical Creation," *Literature and the Occult: Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. Luanne Frank (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 1977), pp. 72–110. On the connection between the poem's reference to gold and the circle drawn by the stiff twin compasses, see also: W.A. Murray, "Donne's Gold-Leaf and his Compasses," *Modern Language Notes* 73 (1958): 329–30; Urmilla Khanna, "Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning'—Some Possible Alchemical Allusions," *Notes & Queries* 17 (1970): 404–05; Anthony Whiting, "Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,'" *Explicator* 31 (1973): 113–15.

[9]In fact, these aspects of alchemy—its archetypal motifs and its vast array of obscure allegories—can make it all too tempting for an eager literary scholar to find alchemical meaning where none exists. Starting from the

somewhat more surprising is the way in which some of Donne's diverse attitudes toward alchemy converge in the Holy Sonnets.

This essay argues that the Original Sequence of twelve Holy Sonnets represents a failed exercise in esoteric alchemy, and that Donne tacitly acknowledges this failure by moving away from alchemy as he revises the sequence. Among the diverse traditions from which Donne drew to compose these nineteen poems—natural philosophy, banking, jurisprudence, Petrarchism, and of course numerous strands of Christian theology—he clearly reached to the art of alchemy for images and motifs, but ultimately found this alchemical material ill-suited to the temperament and trajectory of this little sonnet sequence.

Studies of Donne's alchemy have taken little notice of the Holy Sonnets, often citing a line or two to demonstrate an alchemical allusion without considering the sonnet—much less the sequence—as a whole. The seminal history of alchemy in English literature is Stanton Linden's *Darke Hieroglyphicks*. The narrative that Linden tells in fine detail falls roughly into three acts: first, the rich tradition of alchemical satire in English literature that begins with Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and culminates in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*; second, the great theological and eschatological applications of alchemy in writers such as John Milton and Thomas Vaughan; and third, a brief return to alchemical satire as alchemy itself dies beneath the feet of the Enlightenment. Donne appears as a pivotal figure between the first and second acts, producing biting satire of alchemcy in the vein of Chaucer and Jonson in his earlier lyrics but turning to the same tradition for metaphors and images of spiritual renewal in his more serious letters, poems, and sermons. "In both Donne and

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assumption that Donne and his audiences were relatively familiar with alchemy, and armed with a tool such as Lyndy Abraham's invaluable *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), such a scholar can easily seize upon an image in a Donne poem and impose an alchemical allegory upon it by demonstrating its use by some obscure alchemical writer. We do not know exactly which alchemical authors Donne had actually read, so throughout this essay I make connections primarily to two of the major English alchemists, Thomas Norton and George Ripley, and only to images and ideas in their work which are fairly typical of the larger alchemical tradition.

Herbert," Linden writes, "nonsatirical uses [of alchemy] outweigh those that are satirical in nature, pointing the direction to be followed in the alchemical imagery of Milton and Vaughan. . . ."[10]

Linden devotes nearly an entire chapter to Donne (with three pages devoted to Herbert at the end of it) but does not make a single mention of the Holy Sonnets. This omission is significant in an understanding of Donne's alchemy, because although we do not know exactly when the Holy Sonnets were composed and compiled, they seem to have been written after Donne's most pointed mockery of alchemy in his early poems yet before the esoteric alchemy in the sermons. They seem situated, in other words, exactly between Linden's first and second acts. If Donne represents the transition from satire to spirituality in the grand narrative of English literary alchemy, the Holy Sonnets appear somewhere at the transitional moment in the shorter narrative of Donne's own career—and that transition is not at all smooth. Without a consideration of the Holy Sonnets, it is easy for the scholar of alchemy to characterize Donne along the lines of Izaak Walton's reductive dichotomy between the young rake Jack Donne and the sage Dr. Donne, Dean of St. Paul's. The former snidely mocks alchemists, focusing especially on the failures of exoteric alchemy at producing the Stone; the latter adopts the esoteric principles of alchemy as a paradigm for justification and sanctification.

The Holy Sonnets, however, blend these two attitudes toward alchemy in a somewhat unsettling way. When the Holy Sonnets, in both their original and revised arrangements, are read from an alchemical point of view, a viewpoint that Donne clearly assumed in his readers, two things become clear—and they are the two throughlines of this essay. First, the alchemy of the Holy Sonnets is very often flawed, demonstrating a kind of haste and disorder that is sharply and repeatedly criticized in the writings of alchemists themselves. Second, the sequence as a whole becomes much less explicitly alchemical as Donne revises it, largely because he omits those sonnets that most obviously invite alchemical interpretation. Although Donne's reasons for changing the sequence as he did can never be fully known, and although those reasons certainly involve more factors than his views of alchemy, it seems reasonable to

[10]Linden, p. 155.

conclude that Donne himself recognized some of the problems with the spiritual alchemy in his original Holy Sonnets and therefore moved away from alchemy as a paradigm in his revision. Between his alchemical satire and his alchemical sermons lies this moment of alchemical failure, during which he seems to have attempted and then dismissed alchemy as a useful model for spiritual regeneration.

The present argument builds upon the conclusion of the *Variorum* edition that these poems constitute a sequence whose composition and order was deliberately revised by Donne.[11] Although the manuscript history of these poems is extremely complex, a few basic phases can be simply summarized.[12] Donne originally wrote a sequence of twelve sonnets. Over time, he revised this sequence by omitting four of its original poems, adding four more, and moving two of the original sonnets to the end of the sequence. That is the central narrative of how the Holy Sonnets developed as a group of poems. Additionally, there are three sonnets that appear at the end of the sequence in only one manuscript, the Westmoreland MS, neither in the Original Sequence nor in the Revised Sequence. Whether Donne himself ever intended these poems as part of his official Holy Sonnet sequence, or whether—as seems likely—Donne's friend Rowland Woodward conflated them with the rest of the Holy Sonnets in the

[11]The *Variorum* draws a similar conclusion for Donne's *Epigrams*. For a rewarding study based on that premise, see Theresa M. DiPasquale, "Donne's *Epigrams*: A Sequential Reading," *Modern Philology* 104.3 (February 2007): 329–78.

[12]The appendix to this article summarizes the manuscript history of the Holy Sonnets, and more detailed charts are available in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne,* ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), vol. 7, part 1, *The Holy Sonnets*, pp. lx–lxii. Donne seems to have given little or no thought to *printing* the Holy Sonnets. The earliest printed editions of Donne's works to include them appeared posthumously in 1633 and 1635, adding further complications to the contents and order of the sequence. Because I suggest that Donne intentionally revised alchemical content out of the Holy Sonnets, I limit my comments on the arrangement of the poems to those changes made while he was still alive. I quote Holy Sonnets from the Revised Sequence wherever possible, from the Original Sequence where necessary, and from the Westmoreland manuscript only for poems unavailable in the other two sequences.

Westmoreland MS, this much is clear: Donne chose not to include those three sonnets in his own revised version of the Holy Sonnets.

There are thus four basic categories of Holy Sonnet: those Donne deleted, those he kept, those he added, and those he moved elsewhere in the sequence. (The three Westmoreland sonnets begin in the category of "additions" but ultimately belong in the category of "deletions.") The following study investigates these categories in that order. I begin with two of the more explicitly alchemical sonnets, which Donne ultimately drops from the sequence, and then turn to the more implicit alchemy in four of the original poems that survive throughout the entire revision history of the Holy Sonnets. I then briefly consider the four so-called "replacement sonnets" that Donne adds to the original group, and I conclude by looking at the ways in which the framing sonnets—that is, the first and last ones in the sequence—change when Donne moves two of the original sonnets into those significant positions.

1. Deletions

The place to begin is with the more overtly alchemical poems that Donne eventually drops from the Holy Sonnets, because these poems illustrate the aspects of alchemy to which Donne was drawn early in his composition process. The omission of these sonnets demonstrates a decided drift away from alchemy in the sequence overall, but the poems themselves also demonstrate the alchemical principles with which Donne was working as he wrote the Holy Sonnets.

HSVex ("Oh, to vex me") is almost certainly not an early poem. It is one of the three poems unique to the Westmoreland MS, and although we do not know exactly when Donne wrote it, we know that in this one manuscript it was grouped—either by Donne or by his secretary—with the other Holy Sonnets and that Donne himself did not include it in his own revisions of the sequence. In this sonnet, Donne complains about the contradictory properties of his own identity: cold and hot, constant and inconstant, verbose and mute. To a postmodern sensibility, the fact that the speaker is vexed by his own contrary qualities might suggest a deconstructive view of the self; to an early modern sensibility, it would more naturally have suggested the basic premises of alchemy. The ancient Greeks—Aristotle in particular—

had taught that all creation was composed of the same primal matter, which manifests as different elements according to temperature and its properties (or "form"). When the primal substance becomes hot and dry, it manifests as fire; when it becomes cold and fluid, it is water; cold and dry, earth; hot and fluid, air. Thomas Norton writes: "And soe of *Alkimy* the trew foundation, / Is in *Composition* by wise graduation / Of Heate and Cold, of Moist and Drye. . . ."[13]

All common matter has some of these four properties; perfect matter, theoretically, has them all in equal proportion. Alchemy aimed at nothing less than the perfection of matter, and this was accomplished by bringing the four contrary properties to meet in one element: the quintessence. The Philosopher's Stone is a mystical thing that is somehow equally hot and cold, wet and dry. One of the most common images for the Stone in the alchemical literature—and an important subtext for the Holy Sonnets—is the so-called chemical wedding, wherein a king symbolizing hot, dry, active properties (often associated with the sun) lies together with a queen symbolizing cold, wet, passive properties (often associated with the moon), and the two become not only one flesh but one essence. Contraries meet in one, and their meeting is an occasion of healing and wholeness, not vexation.[14]

In Donne's sonnet, contraries meet but do not merge. A spiritual quintessence fails to develop. Instead of the Philosopher's Stone, this spiritual alchemist is left with a bubbling mess of warring elements. It is instructive to compare the alchemy of this sonnet to the alchemy Donne posits for King David in the sermon quoted above. David, says

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[13]Norton, sig. K1.

[14]Graphic images of the chemical wedding were included in the influential *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550) and reprinted in several other alchemical texts on the Continent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. F. Sherwood Taylor reprints some of them in *The Alchemists* (London: Paladin, 1976 [reprint, origially published 1949]). Although neither Thomas Norton nor George Ripley make much use of sexual imagery to describe alchemy, the allegory is common in alchemical literature, including other texts included in Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum.* See, for example, "Pater Sapientiae" (sigs. EE1v ff.) and "Dastin's Dream" (sig. MM3v). Linden offers a detailed account of how the alchemical *conjunctio* of opposites serves as a subtext for Donne's poem "The Canonization" (pp. 174–76).

Donne, ultimately needed a *fixion*, a steadiness, a stasis after change. That is exactly what the speaker of this sonnet is missing. What David is praying for in the sermon, Donne says, is a soul that is like snow but that does not melt. The soul in this sonnet is characterized by its constant fluidity. As we shall see, the ebbs and flows represented in the sonnet are much more consistent with the alchemical *process* than the rigid permanence to which Donne points in the sermon, a permanence that can only characterize the final (and mythical) *product* of alchemy. Looking at Donne's revisions of the Holy Sonnets through the lens of alchemy, we will easily see that, although he does try to emulate traditional alchemical processes in the organization of the sequence itself, he is ultimately impatient to establish the final product: a pure soul. The fact that he ultimately decides not to include *HSVex*, the Holy Sonnet that best expresses the constant flux of the alchemical process, is perfectly consistent with the persistent drive toward a *fixion* evident throughout the Holy Sonnets.

Of course, we do not know exactly when Donne wrote *HSVex*, but he seems to have written it after several of the other sonnets, so this poem cannot reliably be used to mark a starting point for Donne's thinking on esoteric alchemy. It serves only as evidence of what he ultimately chose to leave out of the sequence. *HS Little* ("I am a litle World"), however, was one of the original twelve Holy Sonnets. Like *HSVex*, it strongly invokes alchemical processes, and—also like *HSVex*—it is omitted from Donne's Revised Sequence.

The first five words of *HSLittle* articulate the Renaissance commonplace that every human being embodies every element in creation—a commonplace that, like the oppositional properties of matter, forms a foundational assumption in alchemy. Thomas Norton explains that "amonge Creatures theis two alone / Be called *Microcosmus*, *Man* and our *Stone*."[15] The Stone is a microcosm because it contains within itself all of the contrary properties found in nature:

> Noble Auctors men of glorious fame,
> Called our Stone Microcosmus by name:
> For his composition is withouten doubt,
> Like to this World in which we walke about:
> Of Heate, of Cold, of Moyst and of Drye,

[15]Norton, sig. K3v.

> Of Hard, of Soft, of Light, and of Heavy,
> Of Rough, of Smooth, of things Stable,
> Of all kinds Contrary broght to one accord,
> Knit by the doctrine of God our blessed Lord. . . .[16]

A man or woman is a microcosm because the human being, as the pinnacle of creation, also contains all of the properties that exist in nature, also in imbalance, and an important part of the alchemical tradition—the part in which Donne participates—is the perfection not only of matter but of the human being.

We see in *HSLittle* the fusion of exoteric and esoteric thinking that animated the art of alchemy throughout its long history. Donne claims that he, like the world itself, contains both a physical and spiritual aspect, and he uses the physical history of the world—the macrocosm—as a metonymy for the salvation narrative of his own soul.[17] That narrative follows the biblical narrative chronologically, beginning in Genesis with the moment that the world/poet is "made" (l. 1), continuing through the fall into sin, and moving on to the great flood. Lyndy Abraham notes that the flood is a common symbol for the early stage of the alchemical process, also referred to as the putrefaction or *nigredo* phase, when the initial matter lies decomposing in the bottom of the vessel.[18] The influential English alchemist George Ripley specifically alludes to Noah's flood when describing this

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[16]Ibid., sigs. N3–N3v.

[17]Thomas Timme describes the history of the world as a massive alchemical operation the prefatory letter to his book *The practice of chymicall and hermeticall physicke, for the preservation of health* (London: Thomas Creede, 1605. STC 7276). Timme points to the opening of Genesis: "*The Spirit of God moued upon the water*: which was an indigested Chaos or masse created before by God, with confused Earth in mixture: yet, by his Halchymicall Extraction, Separation, Sublimation, and Conjunction, so ordered and conjoyned againe" (sig. A3). Alchemy is, moreover, how God will end the world just as it is the art by which he began it: "So in the fulnesse & last period of time (which approacheth fast on) the 4 Elements (whereof al creatures consist) . . . shall by Gods *Halchymie* be metamorphosed and changed. For the combustible . . . shal in that great & generall refining day, be purged through fire: And then God will make new Heavens and a new Earth . . ." (sig. A3v).

[18]Abraham, p. 78.

phase in his *Compound of Alchemy* (V.2).[19] Of course, in the book of Genesis (9:11) God promises Noah that he will not flood the world again, a promise to which Donne alludes when he suggests that the little world of his own soul "must be drown'd no more." The story of Noah's flood is particularly apt for the alchemical process because it ends with a rainbow—which literally appears later in the process as the elements change and combine.[20] God does *not* promise Noah, however, that the world will last forever, and the sestet of the sonnet completes the narrative of salvation history by looking forward to the apocalyptic fire foretold in the book Revelation.[21]

HSLittle is the most alchemical of all nineteen Holy Sonnets, however, not only because it refers to alchemical products, but also because it is entirely structured on the alchemical process, which—like the moist and dry, cold and hot Stone itself—involved a combination of opposites. The most fundamental process in alchemy was *solve et coagula*, dissolution and coagulation: raw materials would be broken down, usually by heating or boiling, and then solidified by cooling.[22] Often this process would be repeated multiple times in order to purify the matter by purging away its imperfections and then congealing the more perfect leftovers into something solid.[23] When the

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[19]Ripley is said to have been Thomas Norton's master in the art of alchemy (see Holmyard, pp. 186–89), and his *Compound* was immensely popular and often reprinted. It appears immediately after Norton's *Ordinall* in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, but I have taken quotations from the modern scholarly edition prepared by Stanton J. Linden, *George Ripley's* Compound of Alchymy *(1591)* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[20]See Abraham, p. 163.

[21]The American folk song "O Mary, Don't You Weep" summarizes God's promise—and the *volta* of this sonnet—in very simple terms: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, / No more water: fire next time."

[22]Abraham (p. 187) points to the character Subtle in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, who explains that the Stone is purified by "giving him solution, then congeal him, / And then dissolve him, then again congeal him. / For look how oft I iterate the work, / So many times I add unto his virtue" (2.3.104–07). Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. Peter Holland and William Sherman in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 3.

[23]The English alchemist Thomas Charnock "repeated one operation 476 times and hoped to continue to the five hundredth" (Holmyard, p. 52).

principle of *solve et coagula* is applied to liquids, the process is generally called sublimation and distillation: a liquid is boiled until its vapors rise to the top of the vessel, where they cool and are captured in a tube as they condense back into liquid form. To facilitate this process, the early alchemists developed the alembic, the beaked boiling vessel most commonly associated with their art.[24] As I will demonstrate in the next section, the rhythm of *solve et coagula*—either as dissolution and coagulation or as distillation and sublimation—forms a narrative subtext of the Holy Sonnets, uniting small groups of sonnets that Donne consistently keeps adjacent to one another throughout his revision process.

Returning to *HSLittle*, we can see that the sonnet is thoroughly concerned with a transmutation that is accomplished through opposing processes. A sense of urgent restlessness emerges in the middle of the poem from the sheer number of times in which Donne reverses his procedures in just a few lines. First, the function of water changes from drowning to washing (l. 9); second, that water itself is replaced by its opposite, the fire of judgement, which is presented here as—third—a transmutation of the "fire / Of lust and envy" that necessitates the burning in the first place (ll. 10–11). And fourth, as if this fire has not been sufficiently transmuted, at the end of the sonnet it becomes not divine judgment but the "firy zeale" for God that consumes the poet but also "doth, in eatinge, heale" him.[25]

In the Original Sequence, this poem follows *HSScene* ("This is my Playes last scene"), which has "gluttonous Death" threatening to "unjoynt" (l. 5) the poor poet's body and soul before devouring him. The closing image of *HSLittle* provides a more hopeful and wholesome

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Sherwood Taylor (p. 73) reports that the Islamic alchemist Jabir (elsewhere spelled Geber) describes processes involving as many as 700 distillations.

[24]For a helpful overview of basic alchemical processes, and the tools used to execute them, see Holmyard, pp. 43ff. Taylor also offers a succinct overview of distillation and coagulation, along with detailed diagrams of early laboratory apparatus, in his fourth chapter (pp. 39ff.).

[25]To an alchemical mind, the paradoxical closing image of the sonnet perhaps recalls the image of Uroboros, the snake that consumes its own tail, a concise symbol for the cycle of death and rebirth. See Abraham, p. 207. The significance of the Uroboros image of course extends well beyond the art of alchemy.

image of that digestive process. In alchemical texts, Abraham explains, digestion often refers to "the refinement or maturation of an uncooked substance by a gentle heat."[26] Abraham cites George Ripley to this effect; Thomas Norton also makes the connection explicitly:

> Digestion in this warke [i.e., the *magnum opus* of alchemy]
> hath great likenesse
> To digestion in things of Quicknes:
> And before other (as I witnesse can)
> It is most like to digestion of Man.[27]

Already, however, we can spot at least one rupture between Donne's alchemical imagery and the tradition from which it is drawn. The all-consuming fire of divine judgment does not, after all, exactly fit the "gentle heat" associated with alchemical digestion, and actual alchemists characteristically insist on this moderation. Bad alchemists were often referred to as "puffers" because they zealously used their bellows, believing that the hotter their furnaces, the better their chances of making gold.[28] George Ripley offers an alchemical commonplace when he advises his reader to keep the heat temperate enough to touch: "Let never thy glasse be hotter than thou maist feele / And suffer still in thy bare hand to hold, / For fear of losing, as Philosophers have told" (II.14). Donne himself seems to have been aware of this principle of moderation when he compared sexual intercourse with his mistress to alchemical transmutation in Elegy 2, "The Comparison":

> Then like the Chimicks masculine equall fyre
> Which in the Limbecks warme wombe doth inspyre
> Into th'Earths worthlesse durt a Soule of gold
> Such chearishing heate her best lou'd part doth hold.
> (ll. 35–38)

That Donne describes the alchemical fire as "equall"—meaning not only "equivalent to" but also "temperate"—is particularly remarkable

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[26]Abraham, p. 55.
[27]Norton, sig. K3.
[28]See Holmyard, p. 46.

in this context, not only because Donne is describing the pleasures of sexual intercourse but also because Elegy 2 as a poem is hardly an example of decorous restraint. In *HSLittle*, no longer a raucous, playful poem comparing two mistresses but a serious treatment of the contest for his soul, Donne ultimately seems to abandon sound alchemical practice. Alchemy's oppositions and transmutations clearly suit Donne's thematic purposes in this sonnet; its moderation does not.[29]

In terms of basic alchemical processes, however, *HSLittle* is remarkably complete. Just as the poem covers the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, so the alchemical narrative represented in the poem indicates the beginning and gestures toward the end of the *opus*, with a central narrative composed of opposing forces. The entire sonnet is focused on dissolution—whether by water or fire—but it is framed by coagulation: in the first line, the poet reflects that he was "made" when God brought together his elements and spirit; in the last line, he prays that the multiple modes of dissolution will, paradoxically, give way to a healing reconstitution.

Especially to the alchemically literate readers that Donne seems to have assumed, both *HSVex* and *HSLittle* readily suggest an alchemical understanding of Christian spirituality. They demonstrate a genuine grasp of basic alchemical principles—such as the human microcosm, the conjunction of opposites, the healing power of digestion—and an earnest effort to apply the basic narrative of the alchemical process—*solve et coagula*—to the human soul.

These two sonnets also, however, demonstrate some of the serious missteps against which respected alchemical authors repeatedly caution aspiring adepts. Thomas Norton writes that three dangers threaten every newcomer to the art: haste, despair, and the deception of servants (sig. F3v). The first two are particularly relevant to the Holy Sonnets. It is haste, a greedy impatience for the final product, that caused immature alchemists to rush the process, turning up the heat of their furnaces in order to accomplish the work of two months

[29]A secular—and thoroughly alchemical—analogue to the immoderate heat of *HSLittle* is "The Dissolution," in which the speaker suggests that his fiery passion will consume him after the death of his beloved. It is less surprising to find that imbalance in a witty erotic poem than in an ostensibly serious spiritual meditation such as *HSLittle*.

in two hours, subjecting their elements not to the nourishing natural heat of digestion but to the fires of the apocalypse. "All Auctors writing of this Arte, / Saye haste is of the Devils parte," writes Norton, "And in this Arte it shall ever be soe, / That a hasty Man shall never faile of woe" (sig. F3v). *HSLittle* suggests an alchemically risky haste: four reversals of process in almost as many lines! Norton's second pitfall, despair, is suggested by the ending of *HSVex*, in which the poet seems sadly resigned to a quaking, fearful existence before God. The poem appears last of all the Holy Sonnets in the Westmoreland MS, and also in modern anthologies when it is included, perhaps because this desperate closing seems representative of all these poems.[30] Taken together, these two attitudes—despair and haste—characterize several of the Holy Sonnets that Donne keeps; they are defining notes in the tonality of the final sequence as a whole. From an alchemical point of view, however, they are most worrisome. This might help to explain why Donne ultimately omits sonnets such as *HSVex* and *HSLittle*, which so naturally invite readers to understand the sequence in the context of alchemy, where his natural inclinations seem so inappropriate.

2. The Constant Sonnets: *Solve et Coagula*

Throughout the many changes Donne made to the sequence of Holy Sonnets, four poems are remarkable for their constancy. *HSBlack* ("Oh my black Soule") is followed by *HSScene* in every surviving manuscript containing the entire sequence,[31] from the original version through Donne's final revision, and the same is true for *HSRound* ("At the round Earths") and *HSMin* ("If poysonous mineralls"). These are

[30]Countering readings of the Holy Sonnets that characterize the poems as wholesome, hopeful meditations, John Stachniewski offers a thoughtful analysis of their abiding desperation in "The Despair of 'The Holy Sonnets,'" *English Literary History* 48.4 (1981): 677–705.

[31]The *Variorum* lists four manuscripts that do not contain any of these four sonnets: AF1, B6, H11, and 30. All of these manuscripts contain four or fewer of the Holy Sonnets—that is, not the sequence as Donne seems to have envisioned it—and all other manuscripts include the four constant sonnets in the same order, with or without *HSLittle* in the middle of them (see Figure 1, p. lxi).

the only pairs of sonnets that are consistently adjacent to one another through all of Donne's additions, deletions, and reordering. In Donne's Original Sequence, these two stable pairs are separated by *HSLittle*, but they are brought together—and never again separated—when he drops that poem in later manuscripts.

Whatever Donne's own reasons for his revisions, from an alchemical point of view it makes good sense to drop *HSLittle* and unite these four poems as a sub-sequence all their own. They subtly but neatly play out the opposing processes—*solve et coagula*—that are apparent in *HSLittle*. The dissolution and coagulation so explicit in that one poem form the implicit rhythm, or plot, of the four constant sonnets. To paint the picture with a somewhat broad brush, the first pair demonstrates spiritual coagulation, and the second pair demonstrates spiritual dissolution. Both *HSBlack* and *HSScene* move from the disordered panic of penitence to the transcendent certainty of grace; *HSRound* and *HSMin* then reverse this move, beginning with grand claims to salvation that dissolve, in the sestet of each sonnet, back into tentative repentance. In alchemical terms, the constant sonnets take the narrative of transmutation from *HSLittle* and spread it out over four poems, adding detail and nuance to that narrative and rendering *HSLittle* a somewhat redundant synopsis in the middle of the story.[32]

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[32]In her edition of *The Divine Poems of John Donne* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1952), Helen Gardner questioned the earlier ordering of the poems by H.J.C. Grierson (which Grierson had based on the 1635 printed edition of the sonnets) at least partly on the grounds of semantic clustering: she found that the 1633 printed edition began with what was "clearly a short sequence on . . . death and judgement, or the Last Things" (p. xl); she also found that the last six sonnets of the 1633 edition ended with six sonnets all on the theme of love. It is now common for critics to find such subsets of the Holy Sonnets, poems in which Donne handles similar subject matter. I am suggesting a degree of cohesiveness somewhat beyond such content-based clusters. I suggest that these sonnets hang loosely together not only because they are on similar topics, but rather that they survive *in this order* because they form an implict narrative trajectory. This kind of narrative connection makes it possible to talk about the Holy Sonnets as a sequence and not simply as a collection of poems. When we read the poems alchemically, we find internal evidence that corroborates the conclusion reached by the *Variorum* editors on the external evidence of the manuscripts, that "the concept of sequence was integral to Donne's understanding of the genre from

The devil is in the details, however, and a closer reading of these four sonnets immediately raises two caveats to this alchemical characterization of them. First, it is not necessary to read the sonnets in reference to alchemy at all—as it is necessary, for instance, to read "Loves Alchymie" or the sermon passage on transmutation. To interpret either of those texts with no knowledge of alchemy would be to miss much of Donne's point. Generations of scholars have consistently and profitably interepreted these four sonnets, however, completely apart from their alchemical potential. However consistent alchemical readings of the Holy Sonnets might be, these four sonnets themselves do not insist on such a reading.

The second caveat is that the dangerous haste that appears in the middle of *HSLittle* runs through these sonnets, as well. If in fact the poems are read as exercises in esoteric alchemy, they are rather bad alchemy. The fact that Donne takes a fourteen-line process and spreads it out over fifty-six lines does not mean that he is proceeding more patiently. These extra lines, in fact, simply multiply examples of haste.

HSBlack, the first of the constant sonnets, requires a good deal of attention, because it is the poem from the Revised Sequence that includes the most apparently alchemical language, and because that language—if it is read alchemically—seems most clearly to represent the kind of haste and disorder discussed above. In this poem, Donne addresses his own sinful soul, imagining that he has been summoned to be judged by God. He compares himself to two kinds of criminal, a pilgrim who has committed treason and a thief sentenced to death. At the *volta* in line nine, he observes that grace is available to him, but line ten turns again to the question of where to find that grace, and the remainder of the sestet is devoted to two tentative answers to that question: either he can turn himself black with mourning and red with shame, or he can wash himself in Christ's blood, "which hath this might / That being Red, it dyes red souls to white" (ll. 13–14).

HSBlack is one of the few Holy Sonnets to have been discussed by critics for its alchemical imagery. Roberta Albrecht, for instance, points to the poet's question in the middle of the sonnet—"But whoe

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the very beginning" and that "the ordering of the sonnets was a matter of continuing authorial intention" (pp. lx–lxi).

shall give thee that Grace to beginne?"—and observes that it was commonplace for serious alchemical writers to insist that human ingenuity alone will not effect true alchemy. It is a process that requires the grace of God, and an aspiring adept had better be godly and gracious before attempting the *magnum opus*. Albrecht cites Eluned Crawshaw, whose remarks on grace and alchemy are apt to this poem: "The adept had already to be in a state of grace if he were to achieve anything in the laboratory. So the alchemist had to prepare himself as well as his materials. . . ."[33] What neither Albrecht nor Crawshaw observe is that the very wording of Donne's phrase "grace to begin" echoes the language of George Ripley, who exhorts his reader:

> Therefore with God looke thou beginne,
> That he by grace may dwell with thee,
> So shalt thou best to wisdome winne;
> And knowledge of our great privitie. (Prologue 12)[34]

Ripley himself begins his *Compound of Alchemy* with a prayer for grace: "At this beginning good Lord heare my prayer, / Be nigh with grace for to inforce my will . . ." (Preface 2).

This posture toward the alchemical project, however, is not one in which the speaker of the Holy Sonnets seems very comfortable. The overall ethos of the sequence is not a humble adept, proceeding in grace and good order, but often more of a quick-witted lawyer, a hasty hustler trying to convince his audience—and perhaps himself most of all—that he holds the Elixir of Life.

Whereas Ripley, like most alchemists, uses this language in the prologue and preface to his text, Donne has tucked it into the middle of a sonnet—one that he seems never to have considered the initial poem in the sequence. The poet is somewhat like a man who has built

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[33]Albrecht, "Coining and Conning: Alchemical Motifs in Donne's 'Oh My Blacke Soule!'" *English Language Notes* 42 (December 2004): 1–10. Her quotation is from Crawshaw, "Hermetic Elements in Donne's Poetic Vision," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 333.

[34]See also Norton: "But *God* hath made that of this blessed *Arte*, / All that be fals shall have thereof no parte; / He must have Grace that would for this Arte sue, / Therefore of right him needeth to be trew" (sig.D1).

the walls of a new house and, finding them shaky, suddenly and belatedly wonders how to go about laying a firm foundation. Juxtaposed with Ripley's words on grace and beginning, Donne's line might seem like a verbal echo, but when the literal arrangement of the sonnet is taken into account, the connection to alchemy seems not quite right. The correct words are there, but their placement is incorrect.

The same is true—and even more so—of the color changes in the last line of *HSBlack*. As several other scholars have noticed, the colors initially suggest the three principal stages of alchemy, each of which is associated with a color. The *nigredo* is the black phase, sometimes called "putrefaction," in which the base metal is purged of its impurities, which form a sickly sludge in the bottom of the vessel; next comes the *albedo* or white phase, in which the purified matter is separated from that sludge; and finally comes the *rubredo*, the red phase, which results in the Philosopher's Stone. In alchemy, the phases happen in that order: black, white, red. Thomas Norton spells out this order quite clearly, distinguishing the alchemical color sequence from how the colors might appear in other philosophical systems:

> The midle Colour as *Philosophers* write,
> Is *Red* Colour betweene Black and White:[35]
> Nethelesse trust me certainly,
> Red is last in work of Alkimy.[36]

It is not last, however, in the final line of *HSBlack*, which offers a crux for critics: the presence of black, white, and red invites alchemical interpretation, but the order of those colors resists that reading. Again, the correct words are there, but their arrangement is incorrect. The

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[35]What Norton means by "midle Colour" is not entirely clear. Ancient philosophy, from Empedocles through Aristotle, understood black and white as extreme colors on either end of a spectrum, with all other colors lying between them. Of these three colors, then, red was indeed conceptualized in the middle of the other two, although I am not aware of any scheme in which it is the central color. Norton is here less concerned with a precise rehearsal of ancient color theory than with the correct sequence of alchemical phases.

[36]Norton, sig. I4v.

line therefore confronts us with a simple but difficult question: is this alchemy at all? It will be useful to sort through possible answers to that question, but in the end it is the difficulty of the question itself that is the real point. Donne revises the sequence in such a way that this question remains an open one even for an alchemically literate reader.

If we do regard the end of this sonnet as an attempt at esoteric alchemy, we need to explain why its sequence is wrong, a clear violation of the most basic alchemical syntax. There would seem to be two possible explanations. The first is that Donne simply slipped; he made a mistake. He knew the right order—it is implausible that he did *not* know it, given the alchemical knowledge evident in his other writings—but he accidentally misrepresented it in this poem. This explanation, however, seems unlikely. However possible it might have been for Donne to make such a basic blunder when drafting a poem, the error could hardly escape his notice through the entire revision history of the Holy Sonnets. (Recall that this poem is one of the eight sonnets that remain constant through nearly all of the extant manuscripts.)

A second explanation might be that the bungled syntax is a conscious error on Donne's part, a deliberate flouting of alchemical principles for rhetorical effect. He clearly does this elsewhere. In the "nocturnal upon S. Lucies Day," as mentioned earlier, Donne compares himself to "a quintessence even from nothingnesse" (l. 15). In strictly alchemical terms, that phrase makes no sense. The fifth element is the exact opposite of nothing: it is literally everything, comprising as it does the properties of all four natural elements. Donne obviously knew alchemy not only well enough to get its concepts right, but even well enough to get them strategically wrong. If Donne does conclude *HSBlack* with a similar move, however—with a strategic deviation—it is a move that is nowhere near as deft as the move in the "S. Lucies" poem. The misprision in the "nocturnal" is caused by the word "quintessence," which has obvious and unavoidable alchemical connotations and which clearly contradicts "nothingnesse." In *HSBlack*, however, the colors red, black, and white are not as unavoidably alchemical as the word "quintessence"; there are other ways to make sense of them. Nor is there any word in this poem to correspond to the "nothingnesse" in the "nocturnal," that is,

a word or image that clearly negates the alchemical principle to create semantic tension. In short, Donne has not here provided any explicit cue that he is deliberately going off the map.

And what would be the effect or point of representing shoddy alchemy in this poem, which seems so earnestly eager for complete and genuine spiritual transmutation? In the "nocturnal," the "quintessence even from nothingnesse" has shock value and deepens the poem's central binaries of presence and absence, darkness and light. When Donne does get alchemy deliberately wrong, in short, he seems to know that he is getting it wrong, *we* know that he knows he is getting it wrong, and we can generally tell *why* is he is doing so. None of those things seems true of the ending of *HSBlack*.

Without compelling evidence that Donne has disordered the alchemical syntax in the last line, either delinquently or deliberately, it is little wonder that scholars have tended not to read the line alchemically. Even among critics who have recognized the alchemical signifiance of the black, red, and white, the most popular approach has been to dismiss an alchemical reading in favor of some other frame of reference. Crawshaw, for instance, finds that the color sequence in *HSBlack* must be liturgical because "an alchemical reading makes nonsense of it."[37] Subsequent critics have gone so far as to see the word "red" as a pun on "r-e-a-d," in which case Christ's blood is not merely as red as blood but also "read" as a text. The power in the blood lies not in its color but rather in its interpretation.[38] If that reading seems somewhat strained as an alternative to the alchemical one, there are also the verses from Isaiah: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). It is perhaps worth recalling the sermon on Psalm 51, where Donne uses the *fixion* of the successfully transmuted metal to explain what the psalmist meant by the phrase "whiter than

[37]Crawshaw, p. 348.

[38]See Thomas Hester's "The troubled wit of John Donne's 'blacke Soule,'" *Cithara* 31.1 (1991): 16–27; Ewa Borkowka, *From Donne to Celan: Logo(the)logical Patterns in Poetry* (Katowice: Wydawn, 1994).

snow," clearly drawing connections between the color white, spiritual purity, and the final stage of an alchemical process.[39]

The point is that Donne does not insist on an alchemical reading of this sonnet. Donne allows other readings to dominate a reader's interpretation. When alchemists say that white comes before red, while Isaiah and the psalmist say that red comes before white, Donne is content to follow the sequence from scripture without worrying about the alchemical implications of his imagery. At the end of *HSBlack*, I suggest, Donne is merely tinkering with esoteric alchemy, trying out some of its imagery without fully committing to an explicitly alchemical paradigm. That alchemical paradigm would be invoked much more strongly by the meeting contraries of *HSVex* or the "little world" and healing digestion of *HSLittle*, but Donne deletes those poems from the sequence, leaving few, if any, irresistible invitations to read the sequence alchemically.

The choice to back away from an alchemical paradigm is all the more surprising given both Donne's obvious familiarity with that pardigm and its ready compatibility with the narrative rhythm of the Holy Sonnets, especially when we pay attention to the movement among the sonnets that Donne himself consistently kept adjacent to one another. The above discussion of *HSBlack* might tempt us to claim that Donne simply included potentially alchemical concepts from time to time, but that he was somewhat careless about arranging those concepts in proper alchemical order. We know, however, that he did deliberately rearrange the order of the Holy Sonnets, and when we look at the sequencing of the four constant sonnets—of which *HSBlack* is the first—we can very quickly see an orthodox alchemical narrative. The question of whether the Holy Sonnets are alchemical at all remains an open question—not answered with a simple "no"—because groups of these poems so clearly correspond to alchemical patterns. These patterns are not necessarily apparent within the bounds of any one given sonnet, but when we read the sequence in

[39]The previous volume of this journal is a special issue devoted to Donne's use of scripture. Luke Taylor's essay, "'Oh my black soule': Donne's Biblical Metaphors for Sin," includes detailed discussions of *HSBlack* and the sermon on Psalm 51. *John Donne Journal* 34 (2015): 171–92.

units of two, three, or four poems—as Donne clearly did in revising them—the narratives clearly emerge.

Whatever one thinks of the quality of spiritual alchemy presented in *HSBlack*, it is easily read as a *coagula* poem, that is, a poem that moves from a breakdown toward coagulation. The multiple metaphors for the sinful soul in the octave, along with the pressing question of where to find grace, ultimately congeal into the simple perfection of Christ's blood. *HSScene* runs parallel to *HSBlack* in narrative trajectory, beginning in penitential panic and ending with a purged soul rising cleanly and certainly toward salvation. This sonnet begins with time literally dissolving the poet's life into smaller and smaller pieces—a mile, a pace, an inch, a point:

> This is my Playes laste Scene, Here heav'ns appointe
> My Pilgrimages last mile; And my race
> Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
> My spanns last Inch, my minutes latest point. (ll. 1–4)

Just as *HSBlack* begins with a series of somewhat disjointed metaphors, here Donne says very plainly that his fear of God literally "shakes [his] every joynt" (l. 8).

Like *HSBlack*, however, the breakdown in the octave is answered in the sestet by a sudden, and surprisingly easy, coagulation (or more accurately, in this case, sublimation). Donne's body, ostensibly disjointed, lies in the earth; his sins tumble down to hell. His soul, through the doctrine of imputed righteousness, rises free and clear of the body and the sinking sins: "Impute mee righteous thus purg'd of evill. / For thus I leaue, the world, the fleash, and Deuill" (ll. 13–14). Even a reader with very meager knowledge of dissolution and distillation will find the final images of this poem similar to a working alembic, with earthy sludge in the bottom, fire beneath it, and a rarefied spirit rising out the top. The conclusion of this poem is obviously analogous to George Ripley's comments on *solve et coagula*:

> For the truth I will tell thee without delusion:
> Our solution is the cause of our *Congelation*;
> For *Dissolution* on the one side corporall,
> Causeth *Congelation* on the other side spirituall. (II.4)

This comment of Ripley's unpacks the alchemical pattern of *solve et coagula* in a way that is very relevant not only to this poem but to the Holy Sonnets as a group. It is not merely the case that dissolution and coagulation are discrete phases that follow one another sequentially; any given moment in the process may be understood as *both* dissolution *and* coagulation. The "corporall" and "spirituall" are like two sides of the same coin, simultaeneous aspects of the same event. Ramie Targoff, in her study of the body and soul throughout Donne's writings, observes that the Holy Sonnets are more concerned with the soul than the body, but that "Donne's concerns about his spiritual condition are always entangled with his concerns about his physical condition."[40] Ripley's antithesis can help us to make sense of the way in which—to Donne—the body and soul are connected pieces of the same phenomenon, even as body and soul literally part. It is the dissolution of the body that enables the coagulation of the soul, just as the melting down of an impure metal releases its pure essence to be solidified in the Stone.

Both *HSBlack* and *HSScene* are narrated in the present tense—"*nowe* thou art summoned"; "This *is* my Playes last Scene"—but look forward through a process of dissolution toward a spiritual coagulation that is solid, stable, and fixed. In alchemical terms, they represent the mind of an adept who is observing the dissolution of the initial elements, confident in the perfection that will coagulate at the end of the process. Taken individually, each of these sonnets seems to represent a complete spiritual transmutation from sin to salvation. Of course, a true alchemist knows that the process of *solve et coagula* must be repeated many times before the entire *opus* is complete,[41] and read as a pair, these two sonnets represent this kind of repetition, as well. In *HSBlack*, the poet worries about his black soul but ultimately sees a failproof way forward through the blood of Christ; in *HSScene*, he returns to fearful dissolution, imaginatively repeating the process.

In the Original Sequence, this pair is immediately followed by *HSLittle*, whose alchemical resonance has been discussed above. Viewed not as an individual sonnet but as a successor to *HSBlack* and

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[40]Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 105.

[41]See note 23, above.

HSScene, *HSLittle* provides a more obvious alchemical version of the narrative shared by those two poems. Like them, the poem explicitly distinguishes body from soul (in this case, "Elements" and "spright") and begins with imagery of dissolution, with "newe seas" that will either drown or wash the poet's little world. Like each of the two preceding sonnets, *HSLittle* is triumphalist, or at least hypothetically so, ending with the promise of the poet's healing. In fact, as mentioned earlier, *HSLittle* offers a neat rejoinder to the "gluttonous Death" that threatens to consume the poet in line 5 of *HSScene*—which immediately precedes it in the Original Sequence. In that sonnet, the poet's body gets eaten, but his purged soul rises free above it. Here, the image of devouring is brought full circle: the eating *is* the purging, just as the dissolution of the body is the coagulation of the soul. From an alchemical point of view, all three of these sonnets are notable for their completeness. Each of them—and especially *HSLittle*—includes all of the key moments in the standard alchemical narrative, from the putrefaction of elements through the attainment of perfection.

It is almost as if Donne dabbled somewhat clumsily with alchemy at the end of *HSBlack*, wrote the same process of sublimation more subtly into *HSScene*, and then composed *HSLittle* as a clearer and more successful expression of the spiritual alchemy he had been attempting in the earlier two. Even if this highly speculative scenario is the case, however, we are immediately confronted with the question of why Donne then consistently omitted the most alchemical poem of the three from the later manuscript versions of the sequence. He finally wrote a sonnet in which he handled spiritual alchemy clearly and cogently, and then he deleted it.

We cannot know the causes of Donne's changes to the sequence, but we can say a few things about their effects. As I have already suggested, one effect of dropping *HSLittle* is to make the overall imagery of the Holy Sonnets in general less obviously alchemical. It is true that the black, red and white still invite alchemical interpretation, but without *HSLittle*, it seems even more reasonable to accept scriptural or theological interpretations of those lines instead of an alchemical one. A second effect created by the omission of *HSLittle*, however, is to directly connect the first pair of constant sonnets to the

second pair, creating the stable group of four sonnets that abide in this order through all of the authorial manuscripts of the entire sequence.

The second pair—*HSRound* and *HSMin*—might be said to begin where the previous pair ends: with resurrection. *HSScene* concludes the previous pair with the image of a purged soul rising above the world, the flesh, and the Devil; *HSRound* begins the second pair at the Day of Judgment with a summons to all souls to rise just as the poet's soul has done at the end of the previous sonnet. Whatever his rationale for dropping *HSLittle*, Donne must have recognized how well the ending of *HSScene* leads into the opening of *HSRound*. In fact, it is perfectly reasonable to read *HSBlack*, *HSScene*, and *HSRound* as a single continuous narrative. *HSBlack* is set in the present—"nowe thou art summoned"—at the onset of a terminal illness, and in it the speaker wonders how to repent while he is still alive. *HSScene* moves quickly and imaginatively forward from the present to the future moment when the poet dies. In *HSRound*, he extends this imaginative vision to a moment well *after* his death. In the Original Sequence, *HSLittle* appears between the poet's death and Judgment Day, interrupting the forward thrust of this narrative. Without that poem, the first pair of constant sonnets leads into the second in a way that makes good chronological sense.

From an alchemical point of view, however, the second pair differs from the first in two respects. First, it is even less explicitly alchemical. There are no red, white, and black flags. Second, if the two sonnets can be described as spiritual alchemy, they are representing processes that oppose the sublimations of the first pair. If the first pair of constant sonnets are both narratives of spiritual coagulation, these second two are both clearly poems of dissolution, with the solid certainty of their octaves giving way to humble words and tears of repentance in their sestets. Very simply put, the first two constant sonnets are about the poet rising up from his sins; the second two are about him falling down to confront and confess those sins.

Modern readers who have received alchemical instruction from C.G. Jung will easily identify the "round Earths imagin'd corners" as a mandala, a graphic representation of the perfectly balanced self—

which is Jung's equivalent of the Philosopher's Stone.[42] Early modern alchemists would of course be more likely to recognize in Donne's image the ancient scheme of the four elements and their four neatly opposed properties. The octave of the sonnet does involve the reconciliation of opposites: the dead come to life (ll. 2–3); souls are ordered to return to their "scattred Bodies" (ll. 3–4); the grand gathering unites those who have died by water and those who will die by fire (l. 4). This is the great moment of the union and perfection of all things.

The poet acknowledges in the sestet, however, that the great moment is not actually at hand; he has simply been imagining it. The sestet is literally more down to earth, returning in line 12 to "this lowly ground"—presumably the very ground in which he left his "earth-borne body" in line 10 of *HSScene*. The last three lines are particularly poignant: "here on this lowly ground / Teach mee how to repent, for thats as good / As if thou'hadst seal'd my Pardon with thy bloud." In the previous sonnet, Donne's soul rose to heaven, "purg'd of evill." Here that spiritual coagulation is reversed as Donne's certainty of salvation dissolves in his sense of sin.

The second sonnet of this pair, *HSMin*, moves from disputation to dissolution. It resembles *HSRound* in several respects. The first eight lines of *HSRound*, with their squared circle, are the very picture of completeness. The first eight lines of *HSMin* offer another totalizing schema, quickly move up the Great Chain of Being, covering the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, pointing out that nothing in any of those kingdoms can be damned. The ontological survey continues with the rational, animal, and human, and concludes with God in line 8.

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[42]Jung devotes a chapter to mandala imagery in his monumental book *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), in which he draws deep and detailed parallels between the old theories of alchemy and the "new" process of psychotherapy that he was developing. Jung found that many of his patients who had no knowledge of alchemy or Buddhism were nevertheless drawing figures that were strikingly similar to the elaborate sand figures crafted by Buddhist monks as symbols of cosmic wholeness. Traditionally, once monks have finished such a figure, they wipe it away—which is exactly what happens to the "mandala" in this sestet of this sonnet.

And just as in the previous sonnet, Donne makes a repentant turn in the last six lines of this one. Again the scale of the conversation shrinks, this time from all creation to an intimate prayer. The lawyering tone falls away:

> But whoe am I, that dares dispute with thee?
> O God, oh of thine only worthy bloud
> And my teares make a Heavenly Lethean floud,
> And drowne in it my sinnes black memory.
> That thou remember them, some clayme as debt,
> I think it mercy, if thou wilt forgett. (ll. 9–14)

This is a moment of utter dissolution. The rigid disputation of the first six lines dissolves, and images of fluids abound: blood, tears, flood. Tears and floods are often used in alchemical literature as metaphors for the liquid that condenses and runs down the inside of the vessel during distillation, returning back to the liquid in the bottom from which it came.

If we consider the four constant sonnets as a miniature sequence within the Holy Sonnets, it is a circular sequence: here, at the end of the fourth, Donne returns to key ideas and images from the first, *HSBlack*. In that poem, Donne exhorts his soul, black with sin, to become black with mourning or to wash itself in Christ's blood. At the end of this sonnet, he also presents his own contrition—tears, this time—and Christ's blood as solvents for his "sinnes black memory." In the context of the four constant sonnets, quibbling over the order of the red and white phases seems less relevant: either way, this sonnet brings us back to black. As in *HSBlack*, the end of this sonnet involves a transmutation of the color black itself, from a sign of guilt to a sign of holy repentance: it is the memory of sin that is explicitly identified as black in this poem, but black was also the traditional color of the river Lethe, which Donne hopes will obliterate that memory.

The intricate antitheses of the last two lines reward patient scrutiny: "That thou remember them, some clayme as debt, / I think it mercy, if thou wilt forgett." The "I" of the speaker sets himself in contrast to "some" others, and the obvious contrast on a first reading is between "remember" and "forgett." A second antithesis is the difference between "debt" and "mercy"; Donne does not *claim* forgiveness so much as he *pleads* for it. A third antithesis in the

couplet, however, is curiously—and meaningfully—incomplete. The verb "remember" has a direct object, "them." The poet refers to people like the thief on the cross, who ask Christ to remember *them* when Christ enters his kingdom (see Luke 23:42). The verb "forgett," however, tightly parallel to "remember" in this couplet, does *not* have a stated object. Appropriately, the thing that the poet asks God to forget is absent even in this line; it hovers, an implied blank, after the word "forgett." From the preceding lines, it might seem that "my black sinnes" are the intended object of "forgett"—that is, after all, the clear sense of line 13—but grammatical symmetry with "remember them" also suggests "forgett *me*."

That reading of the final line makes the poem much heavier than a mere request for forgiveness. It not only follows from the tight parallelism of the last two lines but also is consistent with the first question of the sestet: "Whoe am I?" In the ending of this sonnet, Donne is not merely attempting to negate his past wrongdoings, including the specious argument from the first eight lines. He is negating the very self that has been defined by those wrongdoings, and by the end of the poem that is still the only self that he can see. It is a moment of terrible despair. Ramie Targoff points to a long and extremely moving sermon passage in which Donne imagines—in the first person—what it would be like for God to forget his soul. Quoting Hebrews to acknowledge that "it is a fearefull thing, to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31), Donne observes how it is even more fearful to fall *out* of those hands. After describing that abandonment in vivid and moving detail, he concludes: "What Tophet is not Paradise, what Brimstone is not Amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally, from the sight of God?"[43] Clearly the man who preached that sermon would never ask God to forget him, and surely Donne would never pray for damnation (much less call it "mercy"!), but the man who wrote the sonnet is operating in a different rhetorical situation from the preacher, crafting a highly personal point of view from a particular moment in time, a moment when he is fixated on

[43]Targoff, pp. 112–13; *Sermons* V, pp. 266–67. Potter and Simpson speculate that the sermon might have been preached in 1622.

and overwhelmed by his sinful self. It is perhaps significant that Donne does not explicitly pray that God forget him—that meaning is left implicit in the parallelism of the last two lines. It is as if Donne does not dare to come out and pray for the thing that he knows he most deserves.

How different from the first pair of constant sonnets, where Donne can imagine himself with a soul washed white or rising clean above his broken body! Despite the fact that Donne ends *HSMin* with prayer for future forgetfulness, his focus remains fixed on his present self in a way that the first two constant sonnets do not. *HSBlack* ends on "white." This poem ends in a black river, with an aporia of the self.

Taking the four constant sonnets as a group, it is fairly easy to see that the first two amount to assertions of future forgiveness, while the second two renounce—or at least postpone—those assertions in the interest of present repentance. Recalling Ripley's explanation of the corporal and spiritual aspects of the process, we can easily recognize a double-sided alchemical narrative unfolding in these four sonnets: *solve et coagula* on the corporal side; *coagula et solve* on the spiritual side.

In *HSBlack* and *HSScene*, the poet's sinful body is washed or dissolved, enabling the coagulation of a purified soul—or at least a vision of such a soul. In *HSRound* and *HSMin*, that vision is itself dissolved, and the poet's sinful self re-coagulates on earthly ground. From an alchemical point of view, it makes sense that John Donne brought and kept these four sonnets together in this order.

The question of whether these are really alchemical processes at all remains an open one, however, and it is left even more open by Donne's omission of *HSLittle*. Even a reader with a little knowledge of alchemy would recognize the alchemical motifs in that poem, and such a reader would also at least raise an eyebrow at the bungled color sequence that concludes *HSBlack*. Perhaps the rising soul in *HSScene*, especially as it appeared between *HSBlack* and *HSLittle*, would lead that reader to a more alchemical reading of that sonnet, as well. In the Revised Sequence, however, Donne has removed his most explicit invitatations to read these sonnets alchemically. The color sequence in *HSBlack* is the only explicitly alchemical reference in all four of these sonnets. Is such meager evidence—and such garbled evidence, at that—sufficient to justify reading these sonnets as poems of spiritual sublimation and distillation? Even by 1635, when the reading

public could still be deemed alchemically literate, the alchemical patterns I have traced above seem not to have been significant to at least some readers of the Holy Sonnets: the posthumous printing of Donne's poems in that year rearranges the sequence in ways that disrupt not only the mini-sequence of four constant sonnets from the manuscripts but even the two pairs that make up those sonnets. If Donne did imagine these poems as a sort of spiritual alembic, history fails to recognize it as such and quickly shatters it.

3. Additions: The Replacement Sonnets

Moving now to the poems that Donne adds and repositions as he revised the Holy Sonnets, we find more and more evidence of bad alchemy. The principal dangers against which Thomas Norton cautions, haste and despair, are abundantly apparent in these sonnets—especially haste. To return to the image of the alchemical wedding, one of the reasons that Donne's spiritual alchemy never seems productive in the Holy Sonnets is that the sequence as a whole ultimately privileges the active over the passive, the hot over the cold, the strong over the weak.

In a deft reading of the sequence that has nothing to do with alchemy, Gary Kuchar has argued that the Holy Sonnets employ a kind of Petrarchan narcissicism that Donne parodies in his earlier love poems.[44] In Petrarchism, the poet ostensibly pines for the beloved. What he really wants, however, is not a complete surrender of himself to the beloved, but rather the ability to continue longing for her and writing maudlin poems about that longing. Petrarchism is ultimately about the lover, not the beloved; it is certainly not about love, because love involves a willingness to completely sacrifice oneself. This is especially true of love for God, Kuchar observes, at least in the Calvinist tradition with which Donne was coming to terms. Love for God, in a Calvinist framework, means acknowledging one's own total depravity in order to affirm the totalizing grace of God. In the Holy Sonnets, Kuchar finds the speaker unwilling to completely resign himself to God's grace; the speaker always needs to be asserting his

[44]Kuchar, "Petrarchism and Repentance in John Donne's Holy Sonnets," *Modern Philology* 105 (February 2008): 535–69.

own desperation. In this way, "the speaker of certain *Holy Sonnets* uses the discourse of Petrarchism as a way of avoiding the negative, self-dissolving half of the dialectic of regeneration."[45]

Although Kuchar makes no mention of alchemy, his phrase "self-dissolving" is of course telling in the present context. Whether Donne is using explicitly alchemical imagery or not, the Holy Sonnets as a sequence never dwell for long on the "dissolving" half of the alchemical dialectic. It is the *fixion* Donne seeks, and weakness is not his forte. However poignant their brief moments of penitence, the temperament of the Holy Sonnets is most naturally expressed in violent imagery, sudden desperate changes of thought, and persistently imperative verbs: batter my heart, impute me righteous, death be not proud.[46] This last phrase begins one of the most famous Holy Sonnets (*HSDeath*), which also appears in the Original Sequence.[47] It is bold and assertive—a textbook example of what used to be called Donne's signature strong-line style—and as such, it represents a precursor of the revisions Donne was to make. When Donne adds four new sonnets to those he dropped from his Original Sequence, he begins with two poems of dissolution but then decidedly away from that mode of spirituality and toward solidity and certainty.

The first thing to acknowledge about the new group of four—the *Variorum* editors refer to them as the "replacement sonnets"[48]—is that they are not obviously alchemical poems. To my knowledge, no critic has discussed alchemy in any of them, and with good reason: there are

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[45]Kuchar, p. 542.

[46]*HSSighs* ("O might those sighes") is perhaps the most penitential of all nineteen Holy Sonnets, a heavy prayer in which the speaker laments not only his sins but also a lack of resources—"sighes and teares"—to repent for those sins. It is a studied exercise in total depravity and self-negation, and it is another of the poems that Donne drops in revising the sequence.

[47]Although *HSDeath* appears in both the Original and Revised Sequences, I have not characterized it as one of the "constant sonnets" because its position is not constant—that is, in the Revised Sequence it is not adjacent to either of the sonnets that surround it in the Original Sequence. It is useful, however, as an indicator of the values and attitudes that remained stable throughout Donne's composition process.

[48]See pp. lxvii ff.

no images that even scholars of alchemy would immediately regard as alchemical. If Donne was still thinking of alchemical principles when he added these sonnets—and perhaps he was not—he kept those principles implicit in the poems. This fact alone suggests that he eventually all but abandoned the spiritual alchemy with which he seems to tinker in poems such as *HSVex*, *HSLittle*, and *HSBlack*. This is admittedly an argument from a negative, but alchemy is *ostentatiously* absent from these poems when we consider both the degree to which they nevertheless conform to alchemical patterns and also Donne's own willingness to express those patterns alchemically in other Holy Sonnets.

If we set Donne's intentions to the side for the moment and assume—somewhat willfully—that the four new poems are exercises in spiritual alchemy, we might easily divide these four sonnets into two sequential pairs, and we quickly see that narrative of these four poems is the converse of the four constant sonnets discussed above. To review, those sonnets moved from spiritual coagulation in the first pair (the red soul dyed to white in *HSBlack*; the purified soul rising above the putrefied flesh and sins in *HSScene*) to spiritual dissolution in the second pair (*HSRound* and *HSMin*). The four new sonnets move from dissolution in the first pair—*HSSpit* ("Spitt in my face") and *HSWhy* ("Why are wee by all Creatures")—to coagulation in the second—*HSWhat* ("What if this present") and *HSBatter* ("Batter my heart"). In other words, this new group of four extends the plot of the four constant sonnets by reversing it: they bring the poet back to the state of spiritual coagulation—the *fixion*—that he reaches in the first two constant sonnets but renounces in the second two. Donne could very easily and naturally have fleshed out the alchemical imagery in these four new poems, because the bones of their plot—either taken as a group of four or taken as the second half of a group of eight—are soundly alchemical.

The first sonnet in the new group of four, *HSSpit*, is the opposite of the first sonnet in the old group of constant sonnets, *HSBlack*, in several respects. *HSBlack* ends with Donne's triumphant hope in claiming the purity of Christ's blood for his own. *HSSpit* begins with an attempt to identify with Christ—the speaker imagines the Jews at the crucifixion spitting in his own face—but quickly renounces that identification: "But by *my* Death cannot bee satisfied / My sinnes

which pass the Jewes impietie" (ll. 4–5, emphasis added). Perhaps the most interesting words of the octave are "nowe glorified," and they are interesting precisely because of their location: nothing in the preceding lines suggests that Donne is anything like "glorified," and the final word of the first eight lines serves primarily to illustrate the height from which Donne has fallen. Not only is the speaker unequal to the crucified Christ, but he is also unequal even to those who crucified him.

The sestet of this sonnet is a bit loose in the way that the octave of *HSBlack* is loose: it uses a few more comparisons than necessary to make its point. Christ's sacrifice on the cross is contrasted with the pardon of kings (l. 10), with the selfish usurpation of Jacob (ll. 11–12), and—implicitly—with Donne's own attempt in the octave to attain pardon through another person's skin. This is a poem of dissolution insofar as Donne begins with gloriously fixed identity with the risen Christ, but then renounces that identity as he considers it. The union of Donne and Christ in the first eight lines dissipates in the last six: Donne, Christ, kings, Esau.

In fact, this poem is more like *HSMin* than *HSBlack*, at least in terms of its ethos. As I observe above, *HSMin* ends with an implict possibility that Christ forget him, and *HSSpit* fairly well enacts that amnesia. The last personal pronoun in the poem is the "mee" in line 9. After that, Donne eschews any reference to himself, which means that the point of the sonnet depends heavily on a reader's ability to connect his imaginative identification with Christ in the first two lines with Jacob's sheepish costume in lines 11–12. The image of the speaker himself dissolves in this poem.

HSWhy ("Why are wee by all Creatures"), similarly, is a poem of self-dissolution. The first ten lines of the poem feature relatively few twists or surprises for a Donne sonnet, making the rather straightfoward point that human beings are "weaker" and "worse" than animals and elements because they have sinned (l. 9), despite the fact that Nature has given humans dominion over the "more pure" (l. 3) parts of creation. The turn of the poem comes in line 10, where the oddity of this dominion is surpassed by a "greater wonder" still: the very creator of this natural order—who is of course not bound by Nature, as animals and elements are—subjects himself to death.

The alchemical process begins when the alchemist dismantles the properties of the matter at hand, and somewhat like a good alchemist, in this poem Donne dissolves traditional ontological categories. He melts down several links in the Great Chain of Being when he asserts that humans are lower than animals and elements, and when he tacitly observes that God and animals are alike in terms of their subjection to death at human hands (ll. 7, 14). It is understandable why Donne consistently placed this poem adjacent to *HSSpit*, because both sonnets reject the kind of identification with Christ that Donne claimed in his first pair of constant sonnets (the cleansing power of Christ's blood in *HSBlack*, the imputed righteousness of *HSScene*). In each of these two new poems, Donne's point is to *distinguish* himself from Christ and to put himself beneath both the human brutes who crucified Christ and the actual brutes of the field. Both of these sonnets dissolve traditional hierarchies in ways that humiliate their speaker. These are poems of dissolution and renunciation.

The next pair of replacement sonnets, however, *HSWhat* and *HSBatter*, neatly oppose this first pair by representing processes of assertion and coagulation. They argue for solutions rather than admitting dissolution, and it is here that we most clearly see the imbalance in Donne's handling of the chemical wedding. These two sonnets are where Donne most clearly reuses erotic arguments and images for spiritual purposes, and in both of these poems we find the hot, active, male aspects of Donne's soul attempting to overcome the passive submission of the previous two sonnets.

HSWhat ("What if this present"), for example, turns on a bit of casuistry which Donne explicitly acknowledges as an argument he has earlier used to seduce "Prophane Mistresses," namely the notion that the beauty of Christ's outer form on the cross is a sure sign of his inner pity toward a sinner such as Donne. To a modern mind, the argument seems strained and insulting: beautiful women take pity and say "yes," so a chaste girl who says "no" must be one of the ugly ones. It is true that Donne's readers might have been more comfortable with the Neoplatonic assumptions on which this argument is based, and it is also true that the ideal love expressed by Christ's crucifixion is beautiful in a conceptual way, but the argument as Donne presents it is nevertheless jarring, both because Donne so baldly announces it as

"Prophane" and because the battered and bloody "forme" of Christ portayed in the poem itself is hardly "beauteous."

The word "assures" in the final line is telling.[49] Here is the Donne we know from earlier in the sequence and from the sermon on Psalm 51: the Donne who wants his soul washed white immediately, rising pure and clean by the end of fourteen lines, the Donne who—like David—desperately needs a *fixion.* Perhaps in response to the dissolution of the previous two sonnets, this poem constitutes a rushed attempt to coagulate Donne's soul.

At first glance, it might seem that the next poem, *HSBatter*, is a poem of dissolution and renunciation. Its imagery certainly favors destruction, often of an alchemical kind: battering, breaking, blowing, burning, divorce. Donne accuses God of attempting only to "knock, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend," in the way that someone might attempt to clean and polish an old piece of metal with a puff of breath and a quick scrub, when what is needed is to melt the thing down in a forge or crucible and reconstitute it completely (l. 2). The poem, moreover, involves two principal conceits, the poet as a conquered city and the poet as a stolen bride, both of which position Donne as the passive recipient of external forces. The sonnet, however, is quite *aggressively* passive. Like the previous sonnet, this one is jarring in its application of erotic love to spiritual devotion; the poem itself batters conventional Christian sensibilities. It batters conventional alchemical sensibilities, as well. The chemical wedding—reduced in the preceding sonnet to a sophistical pick-up line—here finds expression as rape. There is no balance of active and passive forces; no patient comingling of male and female principles. The abundant alchemical potential of the poem's ideas and images goes completely unrealized.

The keynote of this poem is impatience. It is again as if the poet hopes to envision the entire process of transformation, from the dissolution of the initial matter through its final perfection, in the space of fourteen lines. Sudden conversions of this kind are of course not unheard of in the Christian tradition, but they are repeatedly and insistently resisted in the writings of true alchemists, such as Thomas Norton and George Ripley. Donne's aggressive, impatient method in

[49]It has also been historically contested. The 1633 printed edition of Donne's poems gives "assumes" instead of "assures."

the sonnets is not, in other words, necessarily bad devotion, but it is certainly not very good alchemy.

Taken together, then, the four replacement sonnets demonstrate a shift in Donne's use of alchemy from the Original Sequence. It is not necessary to read these new sonnets alchemically, because nowhere in these four new sonnets does Donne use imagery that is unequivocally alchemical. It is of course possible to associate the mythical river Lethe with the dark sludge of alchemical putrefaction, but Donne does not directly invite that association in the Holy Sonnets—any more than he invokes the imagery of the chemical wedding. If we wish to discover alchemy here, we need to read it *into* the poems, not out of them. If we do read these four new sonnets as spiritual alchemy, moreover, their narrative pattern is the exact converse of the four constant sonnets, moving not from hasty coagulation to penitential dissolution, but from dissolution back to coagulation—to the *fixion*.

If the sequence were merely these eight sonnets—namely, the constant sonnets and the replacement sonnets—we might be able to construe them as a circular cycle, somewhat like Donne's *La Corona* sequence, moving from solidity to dissolution and back again through coagulation. As we shall see in a moment, however, the beginning and the ending of the Revised Sequence serve to reinforce the dry, hasty certainty toward which Donne moves in the replacement sonnets.

4. Rearrangements: Framing the Sequence

The Revised Sequence of Holy Sonnets begins and ends with two different poems from those that begin and end the Original Sequence. When we compare the ways in which these sonnets frame their respective sequences, we quickly see that the revised frame emphasizes the kind of alchemical imbalance noted above, that is, a concern for activity and certainty, a privileging of the traditionally male properties in the chemical wedding. By beginning and ending the sequence with poems that emphasize these properties, Donne exerts control over the more dynamic narrative of coagulation and dissolution that unfolds in the middle of the sequence. This kind of control is similar, of course, to the control afforded by the frame of the sonnet form itself. "With its built-in mechanisms for posing and answering its own questions," writes Targoff, "the sonnet allows

Donne to unleash and then rein in his imaginative reach, to create hypothetical and counterfactual scenarios that can be poetically if not devotionally resolved."[50] These scenarios cannot be alchemically resolved, either, which may be why Donne turns to more legal frames of reference.

The Original Sequence of Holy Sonnets begins with the words "Thou hast made me," and that sequence ends with lines—in *HSWilt* ("Wilt thou love God")—that also emphasize the word "made":

> The sonne of glory came downe, and was slayne,
> Us whome h' had made, and Satan stole, t' unbind.
> 'Twas much that man was made like God before,
> But that God should be made like man, much more.
> (ll. 11–14)

Although the structure of the Holy Sonnets is nowhere as deliberate as the precise circularity of Donne's *La Corona*, if he was paying any attention to the structure of his Original Sequence of Holy Sonnets, he could hardly help but notice that the very first verb of the sequence—"made"—is literally repeated three times in its last three lines. From an alchemical point of view, lines such as these clearly position the speaking voice not as an active maker but as passive matter in the shaping and perfecting hands of God.

The first eight lines of *HSMade* show the poet's mind attempting to scurry about on his own, but—boxed in by Death and Despaire—he is paralyzed: darkness presses in on him from before, behind, and below. Only in the sestet does he look up to discover a possible direction of escape, and that escape can only be effected if he allows God's magnetic grace to lift his "Iron hart" (l. 14). Angus Fletcher has suggested that, here and elsewhere, Donne draws upon William Gilbert's theories of magnetism, according to which a loadstone excites in the target metal an energy and will to join the loadstone. Even read along those lines, however, the sonnet presents a poet

[50]Targoff, p. 107.

whose own internal energies can only amount to inertia until they submit to a stronger power above them.[51]

Donne tends to revise this submission out of the Holy Sonnets. Although magnetism is the metallic theory most obviously relevant to *HSMade*, the poem has alchemical resonance, as well. *The Mirror of Alchimy*, a late sixteenth-century translation of a text attributed to Roger Bacon, begins by noting the basic properties of several metals. Following ancient alchemical tradition, the *Mirror* says that all elements are ultimately composed of sulphur (hot and active) and mercury (cold and passive). Iron has an imbalance of sulphur, and its more passive properties—from the mercury—are impure.[52] Iron is described in terms very similar to the character of Donne that we have seen in the Holy Sonnets: "Iron is an unclean and imperfect body, engendred of Argent-vive [i.e., quicksilver, mercury] impure, too much fixed, earthy, burning, white and red not cleare, and of the like Sulphur: It wanted fusion, puritie, and weight: It hath too much fixed uncleane Sulphur, and burning earthinesse."[53]

Although it is doubtful whether Donne himself intended his readers to find these properties of iron in the last lines of this poem, the sonnet itself can be read in a more general alchemical context from its very first lines. "Thou hast made me," it begins, "and shall thy worke decay?" (l. 1). The word "worke" (Latin *opus*) is a common term for the alchemical process as a whole, and the sonnet is clearly concerned with the decomposition and ultimate perfection of a made substance. A true alchemist's answer to the opening question of this sonnet would surely be in the affirmative: yes, the work shall indeed decay in order for it to become purified. Whereas an alchemist would readily begin by working through putrefaction as the first step in the process, however, the speaker of the sonnet wishes to bypass that unpleasant phase altogether. He wishes to be remade, not first unmade. Read as spiritual alchemy, this poem presents a soul wavering

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[51]Angus Fletcher, "Living Magnets, Paracelsian Corpses, and the Psychology of Grace in Donne's Religious Verse," *English Literary History* 72 (Spring 2005): 1–22.

[52]Roger Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy, composed by the thrice-famous and learned fryer, Roger Bachon, sometimes fellow of Martin Colledge: and afterwards of Brasen-nose Colledge in Oxenforde* (London: Richard Olive, 1597. STC 1182).

[53]Ibid., sigs. A4–A4v.

on the brink of spiritual transformation, as yet unwilling to dare to enter the darkness in which that transformation must begin. In any case, when he revises the sequence, Donne drops this poem of passivity. Perhaps Donne was enough of a spiritual alchemist to know the answer to the question "shall thy worke decay?" and, not liking the answer, he decided—as any good lawyer would—to withdraw the question.

In any case, by dropping *HSMade*, Donne effectively turns the second sonnet, *HSDue* ("As due my many titles"), into the first poem of the Revised Sequence. As in *HSMade*, in *HSDue* Donne acknowledges that he "was made" by God (l. 2); he refers to himself as God's "owne worke" (l. 11).[54] Perhaps a part of Donne's decision to drop *HSMade* from the Original Sequence was the fact that key ideas such as these somewhat redundantly appeared in both of his first two poems. Whereas *HSMade* reads rather easily through the lens of natural philosophy, however, *HSDue* is more clearly a legal argument. Even the two sigla of these sonnets make this shift clear: in the first he is God's because God *made* him; in the second, he is God's because he is legally *due* to God. In *HSDue*, the "madeness" of the poet is merely the first of several claims he is making as part of his case to prove God's ownership: he is God's property because, among other reasons, God built and crafted him. Although it is true that as a manufactured object, the poet is somewhat passive in this poem, his madeness is mentioned very briefly as one fact in the *narratio* of an active and aggressive legal case the poet is compiling. Throughout the sonnet, the poet speaks of his value primarily using financial terms: he was "bought" by Christ's blood (l. 4); he is a "repaid" servant (l. 6); property that has been usurped and stolen by the devil although it belongs to God by "right" (ll. 9–10). By dropping *HSMade* from his Revised Sequence, Donne drops the proto-scientific potential of that poem in favor of this more litigious approach to personal salvation. The holy sonneteer no longer begins by positioning himself has a metal, a lump of dull iron; he is now valuable merchandise.

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[54]Cf. Ripley's introductory prayer: "Most curious Cofer and copious of all treasure, / Thou art he from whome all goodnes doth discend, / To man and also to every creature, / Thine handy-work therefore vouchsafe to defend . . ." (p. 21).

Like *HSMade* in the Original Sequence, *HSDue* begins the Revised Sequence on a note of desperation. "Despair" is named, almost as a character, in *HSMade* (l. 6). It appears more subtly in *HSDue* when the speaker indicates that he "shall soone despair" (l. 12) when he thinks that God might not grant his suit, leaving the hapless plaintiff in the hands of the devil. Although in revising the Holy Sonnets, Donne seems to shift from alchemy toward a more legal framework in order to gain more certainty and control, in fact the shift gives him neither of those things. We do not know whether this alchemist-turned-lawyer wins his case. As noted above, he uses the sonnet form for the control it affords him, but even his most thunderous sonnets end inconclusively: "Death thou *shalt* dye," not "Death thou art dead." John Stachniewski identifies the tension between the mastery Donne seeks and the despair that he actually feels as a productive tension that animates the Holy Sonnets. The formal structure of the sonnets is an illusion, he writes, because "no verbal effusion in an excited state of mind confines itself to fourteen even lines and a regular rhyme scheme." Stachniewski sees the Holy Sonnets as poems that "embody the strain between an intense psychic state which gave rise to them and the verbal and formal restrictions imposed on the expression of that state by verse."[55]

In any case, in both *HSMade* and *HSDue*, despair is largely what generates the speaker's urgency—his insistence that God hurry up and save him. These poems are dominated by haste and despair that Norton finds so inimical to good alchemy. However Donne re-envisions the frame for his Holy Sonnets, in other words, that frame does not fit neatly around an alchemical paradigm.

Moving now from the revised beginning of the sequence to its revised ending, we see that Donne makes very similar choices. By the end of the Original Sequence, Donne is already moving away from this a position of passivity toward a more active and aggressive style of spirituality. The Original Sequence concludes with *HSWilt*, as quoted above. The concept of being "made" is certainly the unifying idea of those lines, but they, too, are obviously part of a legal argument more than they are an attempt at spiritual alchemy.

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[55]Stachniewski, p. 684.

In her article on *HSBlack* and *HSWilt*, Roberta Albrecht finds *HSWilt* a more successful effort at the spiritual alchemy Donne was attempting in *HSBlack*.[56] In *HSBlack*, Donne "depicts a speaker intent upon paying his own way to heaven with counterfeit gold"—as suggested by the false sequence of alchemical color changes at the end of that sonnet—whereas *HSWilt* "depicts a speaker who has learned that Christ is the great Adept, the only one capable of making gold sufficiently pure to buy back his 'stolne stuffe.'"[57] The latter sonnet, Albrecht writes, "shows Christ doing all the making."[58]

Albrecht's reading of *HSBlack* is sound, but there are two problems with her interpretation of *HSWilt* as successful spiritual alchemy. First, and most obviously, the principal point of the poem is clearly not about the transformation of an imperfect substance into a perfect one. In fact, the point is very nearly the exact opposite of alchemical transmutation. That humans are made Godlike—the very goal of spiritual alchemy—is "much," Donne acknowledges, but "much more" is the converse: that the perfect God would be made like man. Christ himself is, of course, often equated with the Philosopher's Stone by Christian alchemists, but primarily because of the narrative of his resurrection, not because of his incarnation. It would take a rather foreceful act of interpretation to read the incarnation as an alchemical narrative. The poem is much more obviously legal and financial than it is alchemical. In fact, from an alchemical point of view, the materiality of its central metaphor is striking. Donne describes his soul not as the

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[56]Albrecht's "Coining and Conning," cited above, is rare insofar as it focuses on alchemy in the Holy Sonnets, and rarer still in that it tracks changes in Donne's alchemy from one sonnet to another—as I attempt to do here. Her pairing of *HSBlack* and *HSWilt* is premised on a chiastic pattern she identifies in the Holy Sonnets in an earlier article: "Montage, *Mise en Scene*, and Miserable Acting: Feminist Discourse in Donne's *Holy Sonnet X*," *English Language Notes* 29 (1992): 24. Although she writes before the publication of the Holy Sonnets volume (7.1) of the *Variorum Edition*, the order that Albrecht takes as authoritative turns out to be the same order that the *Variorum* editors later concluded is Donne's Revised Sequence. In any case her notion of the order of the sonnets is not critical to her argument on alchemy in the Holy Sonnets, which considers only these two poems.

[57]Albrecht, "Coining and Conning," p. 2.

[58]Ibid., p. 5.

gold of esoteric alchemy—the mystical perfection of all things—but as something much more similar to the literal gold of exoteric alchemy—the kind of "stuff" that can be stolen, sold, lost, and bought again (l. 10).[59]

Second, the claim that Christ is "doing all the making" in this sonnet is open to question. It is true, of course, that all of the uses of "made" in the final lines are in the passive voice, and it is also true that Donne's soul in the poem is passively chosen by adoption (l. 7), but consider the opening of the sonnet: "Wilt thou love God as he thee? Then digest, / My soule, this wholesome meditation." From an alchemical point of view, the verb "digest" suggests dissolution: recall the "eating" at the end of *HSLittle*. Whereas in *HSLittle* the poet prays to be eaten by fire, however, in this poem it seems clear that the speaker is not praying to be eaten or digested: he is preparing and serving up the meditation for consumption, and ideally he will also do the digesting. As Richard Strier has pointed out, these first two lines sound uncomfortably like a force-feeding, and Donne is not only the one being fed, but also the one doing the forcing.[60] Donne pushes the meditation upon himself—and the reader—and the passive uses of the verb "made" must be read as a part of the package he is pushing. As in *HSBatter*, if Donne is being passive in this poem, he is doing so quite aggressively.

If this poem presents any alchemy, it is the kind of hurried, aggressive, for-profit alchemy that Donne satirizes in his love poems, not the sober spiritual transmutations found elsewhere in his verse and sermons. Donne ends his original version of the sequence with this poem, which is not explicitly alchemical (which, in fact, ends with the anti-alchemical notion of Christ's incarnation) and which exhibits a forcefulness and materiality traditionally considered antithetical to the alchemical process. For all of Donne's verbal experimentation with black-white-red, meeting contraries, and little worlds dissolving in purifying fire, by the end of the Original Sequence, the process and

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[59]In the alchemical excerpt from the sermon on Psalm 51, Donne similarly tilts toward materialism when he says that David "desired to be such gold as might be laid up in God's Treasury."

[60]Richard Strier, "John Donne Awry and Squint: The 'Holy Sonnets' 1608–1610," *Modern Philology* 86 (May 1989): 378.

methods of alchemy seem ill-suited to the spiritual temperament of the Holy Sonnets.

Donne further emphasizes a more legalistic approach to salvation by moving *HSPart* ("Father, part of his double interest") from its fourth position in the Original Sequence to the more emphatic final position in the revised arrangement. At first glance, this might appear to be an anti-legalistic sonnet, opposing at it does the "twoe wills" of the Father, the first the Old Testament laws which "none doth" fulfill (ll. 9–10), and the second the "healing grace" of Christ's incarnation, which abridges all of the old laws into a simple act of love. The sonnet does not, however, present any serious alternative to a legal paradigm. The good news of the New Testament is expressed not as a radical departure from the legal document of the Old Testament, but rather as another legal document. Lines 10 and 11 appear to present a dichotomy between the "statutes" of the law and the "grace" and "spiritt" offered through Christ, but in the sonnet this is ultimately a false dichotomy: grace constitutes not an extra-legal consideration, but rather a rival will: "Thy Lawes Abridgment, and thy last command / Is all but Love, Oh lett that last will stand" (l. 13–14).

Donne understandably chose as the last sonnet of the last version of the Holy Sonnets a poem whose last two lines each include the word "last." I would suggest, however, that Donne positioned *HSPart* as his parting thought not for its repetition of that one word but for the lawyerly sensibility that he had clearly come to value as he revised these poems. Especially when seen as one half of a frame with *HSDue*—the sonnet that opens the Revised Sequence—this poem clearly creates a legal context for the entire sequence of Holy Sonnets, and that context makes much better sense of the Holy Sonnets themselves than does the alchemical paradigm with which Donne toys periodically throughout the sequence.

The two sonnets Donne chooses to begin and end the Revised Sequence are sonnets that were already present in his original version. He does not take a new sonnet—such as *HSVex*, which concludes the sequence in the Westmoreland MS—to frame the sequence; he builds the frame out of the Original Sequence itself. It seems clear from this fact that Donne's own attitudes and inclinations did not shift dramatically over the composition of the Holy Sonnets, but rather that he shifted the sequence to reflect attitudes and inclinations that had

been there all along—including haste and despair, and the urgent drive for fixity. Looking at the sequence as a whole—in both its original and revised forms—it seems abundantly clear to us that Donne is a better lawyer than he is an alchemist, and it seems reasonable to guess that Donne eventually recognized this, too, as he revised the sequence.

Conclusion

In short, Donne makes some attempt to apply the paradigm of alchemy in the Holy Sonnets, but he ultimately applies it imperfectly at best, combining the kind of vulgar alchemy that he earlier satirized with the devotional alchemy to which he seems to have aspired—and complicating Linden's portrayal of him as a traditional figure in the history of English literary alchemy.

Of course, Donne imperfectly applies virtually *any* paradigm that critics claim to have detected in these squirrelly little sonnets. In the mid-fifties, Helen Gardner and Louis Martz were the first in a wave of critics pointing to the influence of Ignatian meditation on the sonnets, and the sonnets clearly show signs of that influence. But few of them, if any, complete the three actual steps of a meditation in a straightforward way. Similar results come when we look at Donne's Calvinist theology: there is good evidence that he was reading Calvin and in some ways reaching for Calvinism, but inconsistencies abound. In short, there is a long critical tradition of seeing the Holy Sonnets as failed applications of the systems of thought that influenced them. One of the most accurate sentences ever written about the Holy Sonnets is the characterization of their theology by Richard Strier: "The pain and confusion in many of the Holy Sonnets is not that of the convinced Calvinist but rather that of a person who would like to be a convinced Calvinist but who is both unable to be so and unable to admit that he is unable to be so."[61]

Multiple generations of critics have shown how the Holy Sonnets fail to fully apply various systems of thought—Ignatian meditation, Calvinist theology, anti-Petrarchism. But few critics have asked whether Donne was aware of these failures. In the case of alchemy,

[61]Strier, p. 361.

and in light of Donne's apparent revision of the Holy Sonnets, I would suggest that Donne *was* aware that these particular poems do not work particularly well as spiritual alchemy.

The alchemical failure of the Holy Sonnets is nevertheless a productive failure—and in this respect Donne remains more of an alchemist than he himself might like to admit. The same tension that exists between the comforting closure of the sonnet form and the desperate openness of the holy sonneteer's experience—as noted by Stachniewski, above—characterized the life's work of alchemists for centuries before Donne, seeking and never (as far as we know) finding the Philosopher's Stone. As Donne himself observes in "Loves Alchymie," however, the byproducts of failed alchemy were often "some odoriferous thing, or medicinall." Surely one medicinal aspect of the sequence is its poignant representation of an uncertain struggle. Anton Chekhov famously advised an aspiring writer: "You confuse two things, *solving a problem* and *stating a problem correctly*. It is only the second that is obligatory for the artist."[62] Surely the Holy Sonnets fulfill that second requirement.

Donne himself, however, not having read Chekhov, is desperately interested in solving the problem of his own salvation. One suspects that Donne would have found it cold comfort to have achieved mere byproducts in Holy Sonnets, aligning himself with the alchemists whom he had earlier maligned in "Loves Alchymie." The most obviously alchemical poems—those that most explicitly advertise the sequence *as* spiritual alchemy—notably do not make the cut in the Revised Sequence. Given this fact, I would adapt Strier's statement and say that the hasty attempts at spiritual transformation in the Holy Sonnets are not those of an adept alchemist but rather those of a person who would like to be an adept alchemist but who is unable to be so and who tacitly admits that he is unable to be so by eliminating those poems that most clearly identify his attempts as alchemy.

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[62]Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, *Letters of Anton Chekhov to His Family and Friends: With Biographical Sketch*, ed. and trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 100.

Appendix: Donne's Original and Revised Sequences of Holy Sonnets

The table below offers a simplified summary of Donne's two principal arrangements of the Holy Sonnets. It omits such significant developments as the Westmoreland MS and the first two printed sequences of 1633 and 1635. For a more detailed account, see the General Textual Introduction to the variorum edition (lx–cvii), especially Figure 2 (lxii).

Original Sequence	Revision	Revised Sequence
1. *HSMade*	omitted	
2. *HSDue*	becomes first by default	1. *HSDue*
3. *HSSighs*	omitted	
4. *HSPart*	moved to end	
5. *HSBlack*	no change	2. *HSBlack*
6. *HSScene*	no change	3. *HSScene*
7. *HSLittle*	omitted	
8. *HSRound*	no change	4. *HSRound*
9. *HSMin*	no change	5. *HSMin*
10. *HSSouls*	omitted	
11. *HSDeath*	no change	6. *HSDeath*
	added	7. *HSSpit*
	added	8. *HSWhy*
	added	9. *HSWhat*
	added	10. *HSBatter*
12. *HSWilt*	no change	11. *HSWilt*
	moved from earlier	12. *HSPart*

The three sonnets unique to the Westmoreland MS—*HSShe*, *HSShow*, and *HSVex*—do not appear in either the Original or the Revised Sequences.