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# "Dimme Eyes": Straining Sight in "Thou Hast Made Me"

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In his *Essayes in Divinity*, Donne is witheringly critical of lazy or prudent thinkers who are content with the incomplete knowledge of God within easy reach of all human beings. "Men," he complains, "which seek God by reason, and naturall strength . . . are like Mariners which voyaged before the invention of the Compass, which were but Costers, and unwillingly left the sight of land" (*Essayes*, p. 24).[1] For Donne, looking for God in the images of "his Creatures, and seeming Demonstration," is all very well for "costers" who are content to "get no further, then to know what he *doth*, not what he *is*"; but for those not satisfied with such "late" and "infirm" knowledge (*Essayes,* p. 25), there is happily a more venturesome option:

> But as by the use of the Compass, men safely dispatch *Ulysses* dangerous ten years travel in so many dayes, and have found out a new world richer then the old; so doth Faith, as soon as our hearts are touched with it, direct and inform us in that great search of the discovery of Gods Essence, and the new *Hierusalem*, which Reason durst not attempt.
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> (*Essayes*, p. 24)

[1]John Donne, *Essayes in Divinity: Being Several Disquisitions Interwoven with Meditations and Prayers,* ed. Anthony Raspa (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically by page number.

This passage's vision of "that great search of the discovery of Gods Essence" as an inspired odyssey, which no person would dare attempt by reason alone, is the closest thing to a summation of Donne's attitude towards God in his religious verse (outside of the verse itself) as we are likely to find. The questions driving this passage are those that beset a generation of Protestant writers: How far can a creature know God? How far should a creature try to know God? What is the difference between a holy pursuit of God, and a hunt born of the prideful human itch for knowledge? What is an acceptable amount of risk in pursuing (or failing to pursue) God? Unsurprisingly, Donne, when considering these questions in his writings, nearly always favors a high-risk, high-reward option in achieving knowledge of God. For Donne, the search for God's "Essence" is the ultimate end of all earthly endeavors, and the ways God might be discovered the proper concern of life, beside which all other activities are as insipid as they are irrelevant. Nowhere do we see Donne more ardently pursue God than in his devotional poetry: if faith is the compass that guides the explorer, poetry is the (untried) ship in which Donne sets out again and again to find "Gods Essence."

However, when we turn to Donne's poems, we find this daring tempered with a sober awareness of the risks such a search involves; just because the Christian explorer has defeated the dangers of distance Ulysses faced does not mean that he has defeated danger itself. On the contrary, new technologies always introduce new kinds of dangers, and the more ambitious the journey, the higher the likelihood of failure. The specter of such a catastrophic loss is invoked even in Donne's allusion to Ulysses since, as Donne well knew, the last voyage of Ulysses in Western literature leaves the famous explorer not in Ithaca, but in the *Inferno*, where, as he recounts to Dante, his greatest and most disastrous venture was not the "ten years travel" of the *Odyssey*, but the wilder and more ambitious search for "virtue and knowledge" that led him to death and, eventually, damnation—although according to the *Commedia*, he had a glimpse of the divine Mount Purgatory before he and his crew were swallowed up by the waves.[2] It is precisely because the Christian explorer can travel farther

[2]John D. Sinclair, trans. *Dante: Inferno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 327.

and faster than Ulysses, and can "have found out a new world richer then the old" within the medium of his own poetic invention, that his search for God is fraught with more subtle and damning dangers than the day-trips of the "costers."

The risks courted by the daring traveler who leaves the sight of land for the sake of the sight of God are especially evident in the sonnet "Thou hast made me," where we witness (and accompany) an ambitious and inexperienced mariner trying to steer his sonnet form towards God. However, while the poem's speaker fails to get where he hoped he was going, the poem itself succeeds in recording an uncompleted journey that carries both us and speaker further into uncharted waters of divine and poetic revelation. This poem dramatizes the unequal struggles of a speaker-poet trying to reach God entirely through poetic invention, while continually haunted by the possibility that he will not be able to bring God within the compass of his imagination, and that, when God does appear, the poet's own invention will distort God out of all recognition. "Thou hast made me" enacts the dangerous consequences of, as Donne describes it in another poem, trying to make an immense and "cornerlesse" God fit inside "the corners of poor wit" (*Sidney* ll. 3–4).[3] The driving theological-literary question behind "Thou hast made me" is not whether one needs language or images to comprehend God, but whether an individual, working alone and outside of the divinely-sanctioned linguistic and visual forms of scripture and sacrament, can contain God within the zodiac of his own wit. I argue that, in "Thou hast made me," the answer to this question is a qualified "no." The speaker-poet does not succeed in drawing God into the poem's matrix; nor does the poem explicitly help the speaker get any nearer to God—on the contrary, the couplet famously leaves the speaker (and the reader) on an almost literal cliffhanger concerning the speaker's spiritual fate, his voyage permanently incomplete. The poem portrays

[3]"Upon the translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister," in *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & co., 1967). 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 Shawcross's edition.

a failure, but the reason for that failure is not the poem itself, but the shortsightedness (in several senses) of a speaker-poet whose experimentation with the visual, temporal, and spatial capacities of the sonnet form leads to wreck instead of revelation. The sonnet is thus both a cautionary tale and a tantalizing glimpse at the possibilities for explorers willing to learn from its example.

"Thou hast made me, and shall thy worke decay?" which sometimes appears as the first sonnet of the *Holy Sonnets* sequence,[4] establishes many of the structural and thematic parameters that characterize the *Holy Sonnets* as whole, including the central question of whether original poetic forms, shaped and steered by a faulty human hand, can become vehicles of divine revelation. Donne's *Holy Sonnets* contain many attempts to cajole, reason with, debate, provoke and ignore God,[5] but an over-emphasis on the dialogic aspects of the sonnets can obscure the fact that the poems are not merely addresses *to* God, but spaces in which the poet's search *for* God is being conducted; they are surveys of Donne's voyages of discovery for the "new world" as well as, potentially, the outer coastlines of that new world. In making this claim, I am aligning myself with those critical readings that see this sonnet as a dramatization of a spiritual experience, or more exactly a spiritual experiment, rather than a devotional text or model meant to be used by a reader or community of readers to recreate the spiritual experiences of the speaker-poet. While the *Holy Sonnets* reflect and echo the language of the scripture, liturgy, and prayer, all of which suggest "a public dimension for these poems as devotional models,"[6] it is difficult to square the idea that all

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[4]I do not propose to argue for a sequentially-based interpretation of these works, so for convenience, I will be adopting the order and numbering of the Westmoreland Sequence as it appears in the *Variorum*.

[5]See for example Anthony Low, "Absence in Donne's Holy Sonnets: Between Catholic and Calvinist," *John Donne Journal* 23 (2004): 95–115; John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 254–91; and Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 106–29.

[6]Jeffrey Johnson, "Wrestling with God: John Donne at Prayer," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway: UCA Press, 1995), pp.

of the *Holy Sonnets* are meant to be straightforward "devotional models" with the at-times ferocious performance of privacy they engage in. In particular "Thou hast made me" would prove an unfortunate guide for an inexperienced devotee (unless, as Anthony Low suggests, it and its fellow sonnets are "turned upside down, and read as negative exempla of how not to proceed in the spiritual life").[7] As Theresa M. DiPasquale observes, in comparison with Donne's other great sonnet sequence, *La Corona*, the *Holy Sonnets* embrace and exaggerate the "the futile subjectivity and idolatrous self-absorption"[8] of the sonnet form to the degree where they not only ignore, but actively discourage the intrusion of outside perspectives. The need to create an impression of privacy and interiority is one reason for the poet's frequent deployment of complex syntax, shifting theological assumptions, and disorienting imagery.[9] At the same time, the sonnets' self-consciously overwrought images and verbal structures serve a double formal purpose: not only do they ostensibly discourage casual readers from entering into them, they also ostensibly strive to

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314–15. See also P.G. Stanwood, "Liturgy, Worship, and the Sons of Light," in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), pp. 105–23.

[7]Anthoy Low, "Absence in Donne's Holy Sonnets: Between Catholic and Calvinist," *John Donne Journal* 23 (2004): 115. See also Low, "John Donne: 'The Holy Ghost is Amorous in His Metaphors,'" in *New Perspectives*, pp. 201–21; for a discussion of the sonnet sequence as negative example through the lens of mental and spiritual disease, see Roger B. Rollin, "Fantastique Ague: The Holy Sonnets and Religious Melancholy," in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 131–46.

[8]Theresa M. DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), p. 102.

[9]For a discussion of the dangers Donne's images potentially pose to his readers, see Tina Skouen, "The Rhetoric of Passion in Donne's Holy Sonnets," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 27.2 (Spring 2009): 188. See also Targoff's observation that "Donne's sonnets seem built upon ruptures, breaks, and turns" (Targoff, p. 107); and Brian Cummings's observation that a sonnet such as "If poisonous mineralls" "torments itself with questions and condition, [and tests] the reader's wit and nerves with its theological twists" (*The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], p. 399).

function as prison-like boundaries to keep God from getting out (and sometimes enact their own failure to do so). Donne, writing about his poetic depiction of Elizabeth Drury's unimaginable perfections, playfully boasts that "incomprehensiblenesse [will not] deterre / Me, from thus trying to emprison her" (*FirAn*, ll. 469–70). This attitude is repeated, but with more tragic emphasis, in "Thou hast made me," which shows the result of a speaker-poet seriously attempting to summon God into the formal dimensions of the sonnet, only to find that the speaker himself, not God, is the one trapped in "strait corners of poore wit" (*Sidney*, l. 3). In this sense, "Thou hast made me" ends up demonstrating how, as Stanley Fish suggests, "the skillful rhetorician [of the *Holy Sonnets*] . . . ends up becoming the victim/casualty of his own skill."[10]

What is remarkable about this sonnet, however, is that it is simultaneously a record of the speaker-poet's failures as a divine poet and a spectacular success as a divine poem. The speaker-poet does not fail through either a deficit or an excess of technical skill, but rather through losing his bearings within the new and bewildering worlds his skill opens up to him: the poem pushes out beyond "the sight of land" and in doing so encounters new forms and dimensions of language, sight, and sin that offer genuine discoveries. These are discoveries that the speaker is not positioned to appreciate, but that Donne himself certainly was, and that readers, watching his speaker's journey at one remove, are capable of seeing, as one can trace out, retrospectively, the faulty courses and navigational errors that led to a famous shipwreck. If a reader retraces the speaker's course in this poem, she will not necessarily find herself nearer to God; but she can acquire a new understanding of the capacities of a sonnet to potentially access and perceive God through overlapping modes of human comprehension, as well as a ruthless anatomization of the consequences of a rash and unstable synthesis of those modes.

Within the sonnet or indeed any poetic form, sensation, language, and considerations of space and time become foundational structuring

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[10]Stanley Fish, "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 250.

elements. In "Thou hast made me," we see all of these elements being deliberately highlighted, and then fused together, as part of the speaker's attempt to bring God within his poetic ken. The first and most important of these modes is, of course, the medium of language. The enormity of language, especially scriptural language, to Donne as a means of understanding God can hardly be overstated; it shapes nearly every aspect of his religious thought. If not the source of faith itself (the compass that makes the search for God possible) it is the medium through which faith is nourished, maintained, and directed. As Raymond-Jean Frontain observes, Donne's profound belief in the potential of language to "bridge the sacred and profane realms" colors virtually all of his religious writings, poetic and otherwise.[11] Donne famously rejoices in how the Holy Spirit "delights himself" in the language of Scripture, "not only with a propriety, but with a delicacy, and harmony, and melody of language, with height of metaphors" (*Sermons* VI:55).[12] As Donne avers, it is not merely the message, but the medium of language that influences and directs faith: when praising the style and substance of the scripture, he claims that it is in its "inexpressible texture and composition" that a man finds "that argument that binds his faith to believe that to be the word of God."[13] No matter what conjectured fluctuations his precise theological positions went through during his lifetime, Donne never wavers from this singular bedrock principle of Reformation theology: the belief that language was the mode by which God chose to reveal himself to humanity, and that therefore language, both spoken and written, was the supreme means of comprehending and experiencing God. [14]

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[11]Raymond-Jean Frontain, "'Make all this All': The Religious Operations of John Donne's Imagination," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination,* pp. 14, 18.

[12]*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–62). Subsequent quotations from the sermons will be taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by volume and page number.

[13]John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Expostulation XIX, in *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 347.

[14]For an overview of the centrality of language to Reformation writings, see Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace*. See also Heather Asals, "John Donne and the Grammar of Redemption," *English*

At the same time, the centrality of the written word to Protestant devotional thought did not mean that language was immune to the dangers of misapprehension, misapplication, idolatry, and deception commonly attributed to visual representation. On the contrary, as Linda Gregerson observes, language was in some ways more suspect because it was more powerful and "capable of shaping and thus of waylaying the human imagination" with more insidious machinations than even visual images.[15] For Donne, the allure and danger of language lies in how closely it is allied and intermixed with the best revelation of God, and consequently, how powerful a tool for salvation or damnation it can become if used rashly or unwisely. As every Protestant author knew (including those far more iconoclastically inclined than Donne), images are necessary to devotional thought and practice. In the *Essayes*, Donne says he will not be satisfied with knowledge of God drawn from the "crums and fragments of appearances and versimilitudes" (*Essayes*, p. 25). Even so, he is fully aware that the human mind requires images in order to think at all, and therefore any glimpses of God in earthly life or art must be mediated through natural or artificial figures that are at the mercy of the "frailty of both the receiver, and beholder" (*Essayes*, p. 24). While an "image" in this sense is of course not limited to what one can perceive visually (anything apprehended by the senses can help constitute an image, and language is capable of invoking all sensory experiences),[16] in "Thou hast made me," Donne makes sight the key sense through which both the speaker-poet and the reader encounter and understand the linguistic framework of the poem. [17]

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*Studies in Canada* 5 (1979): 125–39.

[15]Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3. See also Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[16]Thanks to Sean McDowell for this insight, which helped me to clarify how intentional the invocation of sight is in "Thou hast made me."

[17]In doing so, Donne is working within the rich complexity of both Catholic and Reformed theories of physical and spiritual sight, and the ways they crossed and overlapped in meditative and other devotional practices. The classic arguments of both schools of thought are found in Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962);

Donne's fascination with the role of vision in accessing God is closely allied with his conception of how images of God can and should function in devotional writing, and particularly the ways that visual epistemology intersects with what Helen Wilcox calls his "profoundly word-centered" conception of God.[18] Ernest B. Gilman's characterization of Donne's poetry as "nearly obsessed with the eye" rings especially true when we turn to his religious work, and more recent scholarship has established many instances of Donne's use of images and tropes drawn from visual culture.[19] Visuality was one of the great lightning rods of English Reformation thought, which built around the sense of sight so many opportunities for spiritual enlightenment and so many pitfalls for damnation. The Reformation's infamous rejection of visual images in favor of "the cabbalistic appeal to the sanctity of the word"[20] can make it easy to overlook not only the obvious instances of integrated image/text objects in Protestant culture, but also the more subtle integration of visual and verbal models within religious thought. In discussing the sixteenth century's loss of "a visual aesthetic that had materialized religious concepts and experience," Michael O'Connell argues that the Reformation's rejection of images "brought to an end a semiotic symbolic field for apprehending and imagining the sacred [and created] an increasingly sophisticated use of verbal modes of knowing and expressing."[21] I would qualify this

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and Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[18]Helen Wilcox, "Devotional Writing," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 149.

[19]Ernest B. Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 124. For further discussion of the role of visuality in Donne's religious writing, see Catherine J. Creswell, "Turning to See the Sound: Reading the Face of God in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination*, pp. 181–203; Ann Hollinshed Hurley, *John Donne's Poetry and Early Modern Visual Culture* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005); and Clayton G. MacKenzie, *Emblem and Icon in John Donne's Poetry and Prose* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001).

[20]Cummings, p. 11.

[21]O'Connell, p. 58.

formulation in that, particularly in the case of Protestant devotional poetry, the relationship of visual (image-based) to verbal (language-based) religious epistemological systems is not so much one of transference as interpenetration. If, as O'Connell posits, Protestant debates over the contrasting and complementary dangers of word and image have behind them "the question of how God is to be experienced,"[22] we ought to be prepared to find within the field of Reformation art and writing hybrid works like "Thou hast made me" that attempt to experience God by combining and juxtaposing more than one mode of perception.

Despite Donne's confidence that it is through language that God vouchsafes a unique form of access to himself, visuality is fundamental to Donne's conception of the human experience of God. Over and over again, in both his poetry and sermons, the "sight of God" is used by Donne as his own shorthand for the "essential joy" of the universe, an event where knowledge of God and knowledge of the self are brought into an unimaginable perfection of revelation (*SecAn*, ll. 441–43). Perhaps Donne's most vivid articulation of its significance is in his terrifying and graphic depiction of its antithesis: the human soul eternally exiled from the sight of God:

> That that God should loose and frustrate all his owne purposes and practises upon me, and leave me, and cast me away, as though I had cost him nothing; that this God at last, should let this soule go away, as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble, and that then this soule cannot be a smoake, nor a vapour, not a bubble, but must lie in darknesse, as long as the Lord of light is light it selfe, and never a sparke of that light reach to my soule; 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? (*Sermons*, V:267)

Here, as elsewhere in Donne, "the sight of God" is treated as a reciprocal state, and a place as much as a perception: just as the saved

[22]O'Connell, p. 10.

human soul both perceives God and is perceived by God in an act of simultaneous, regenerative, and endless reciprocity, so does the damned soul suffer eternal "seclusion" from the sight of God. As Jeanne Shami observes, this terrifying peroration, like other, more positive images of "the heavenly sight of God" invoked by Donne in his sermons, shock one out of the "worldly perspective" of earth and "carry his hearers to contemplate a time and place, then and there, that are radically different from their present occasion."[23]

The above passage also helpfully illuminates the more subtly pervasive modes by which Donne frequently imagines his relationship with God, and which often shape his visual and verbal discourses: space and time. Recent years have seen an exciting resurgence in Donnean space and place theory, plumbing the depths and implications of Donne's almost morbidly vivid sense of place, including how his poetic works break through the spiritual and psychological cul-de-sacs of poetic language to find the new places and pathways that syntax, stanza, and sound carve into the human mind.[24] In this passage, we see the almost exact inverse of a hallmark of Donne's religious poetry that Heather Dubrow has recently identified as "prevenient proximity," that is, a "spatial recording or negotiating of anticipated proximity to the divine."[25] Dubrow demonstrates how the

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[23]Jeanne Shami, "The Sermon," *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 337.

[24]Classic studies on Donne and space include C.M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937) and William Empson, "Donne the Space Man," *The Kenyon Review* 19.3 (1957): 337–99. For more recent studies demonstrating the range of methodological approaches current in the field, see Steven Adam, "'I Their Map': The Poetics of Medieval Mapmaking in John Donne's 'Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness,'" *John Donne Journal* 33 (2014): 131–64; Katherine Bootle Attié, "Bound to Know, Bound to Love, Bound to Last: Donne's Forms of Containment," *John Donne Journal* 33 (2014): 95–130; Heather Dubrow, *Deixis in the Early Modern English Lyric: Unsettling Spatial Anchors Like "Here," "This," "Come"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Lisa Gorton, "John Donne's Use of Space," *Literature and Geography*, spec. issue of *Early Modern Literary Studies: A Journal of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature* 4.2 (1998): 27 paragraphs <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04–2/gortjohn.htm>.

[25]Dubrow, *Deixis in Early Modern English Lyric*, pp. 94–95.

deictic negotiations of Donne's poetics can reveal the tensions and uncertainties inherent in a mutable soul's approach to eternity;[26] in this passage, however, Donne forces us to imagine journey's end gone wrong, when the structures of space, time, and sight that create proximity no longer exist, and therefore there is no hope of ever growing nearer to God. Donne's imaginative intertwining of sight with space is manifest here through the constant directional language: "*leave* me"; "cast me *away*"; "go *away*"; "*lie in* darkness . . . and never a spark of that light *reach to* my soule" [emphases mine]. In envisioning damnation, Donne refuses to indulge in the hope of mere non-existence. He won't pretend that his soul could be so transient and placeless "as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble"—airy substances that have no fixed abode or shape and easily melt away into emptiness, losing suffering and sentience as they lose form and location. Instead, Donne imagines damnation as continuing to exist while deprived of all of the structures of existence. To exist in the unimpeded sight of God is the final fulfillment of creature and creator, and consequently to Donne damnation *means* to be "eternally, eternally, eternally" secluded from the sight of God. This specifically visual and spatio-temporal horror is what the poet of "Thou hast made me" thinks he sees looming at the end of the sonnet, and the shadows of this threat haunt its corners. Equally, however, it is this fear that drives him *into* the sonnet and its dangers in the first place: to *not* search for God will leave one in the same empty, timeless, yet sentient darkness.

I argue, therefore, that the terms of the challenge facing Donne as he sends his speaker into the first line of "Thou hast made me" may be summed up thus: if the sight of God is the "new world" that Donne's voyager sets out to find, and language the divinely-sanctioned means by which God is best and most clearly revealed to humanity, the Christian poet possesses a unique opportunity to discover, by means of his craft, if a poem can create a space wherein one can glimpse more of God than is usually available to ordinary human knowledge. While the speaker-poet fails in his simpler and more straightforward attempt to summon God into his sonnet, "Thou hast made me" succeeds in Donne's more subtle aim to carry itself beyond the conventional capacities of the sonnet form. By heightening the

[26]Dubrow, p. 103.

perceptive and apprehensive elements of "Thou hast made me" through manipulating its formal and linguistic frameworks, Donne suggests that, if a poet is willing to leave "the sight of land" she could see things normally invisible to human sight, and perhaps draw close enough to God so as to glimpse some new aspect of him with human eyes. That this is an insight afforded to the poem's reader, but not its speaker, is deliberate, and indeed necessary to the poem's ultimate success. Although Donne depicts a speaker-poet on the brink of catastrophe, lost in the labyrinths of his poem's visual and verbal dimensions, the sonnet itself is a controlled and complex expansion of those dimensions, and invites readers to reassess our assumptions about what can be found by setting forth in a sonnet.

The full implications of this split perspective are not felt until the end of the poem; in the opening octet the drama and force of the narrative depends on understanding the speaker-poet as being caught inside a poetic trap of his own making, and the speaker himself being unable to understand or anticipate the turns that the sonnet takes. The sonnet opens with a direct appeal to God, which is sometimes read as a vote of confidence in God's imminent rescue of the speaker, although it quickly becomes clear that this can hardly be the case, since the call is prompted by God's (apparent) absence:

> Thou hast made me, and shall thy worke decay?
> Repaire me now, for now myne end do'th hast.
> I run from death, and death meets me as fast,
> And all my pleasures are like yesterday.
> (*HSMade*, ll. 1–4)

In these four lines, Donne economically establishes the speaker's predicament, the sonnet's central conflict, and the temporal and spatial limitations of both. The poet, apprehending with alarm that his life is collapsing in on itself, the horizon narrowing before him and his usual modes of escape or distraction cut off, calls upon God for direct and immediate intervention—specifically, demanding that God "repair" a work that is beginning to show signs of rot. Reading this quatrain in relation to the *Essayes* also highlights the embedded maritime imagery at work in the lines "Repaire me now, for now myne end do'th hast / I run from death, and death meets me as fast," which suggests a foundering ship, being chased down by a malicious enemy

vessel, in too much disrepair to outrun its approaching enemy.[27] That this voyage is being undertaken, not in a ship, but a sonnet, is also subtly underlined in the ambiguity of the opening line: "Thou hast made me, and shall thy worke decay?" By reminding the reader of her and the speaker's common status as created works, the crafted nature of the sonnet as an artificial "work" is similarly emphasized, as is the inevitable end of all mortal works. The reader, like the speaker-poet, can see the end of their journey, and the sonnet, implicit in its first line. By constructing time in spatial terms, this quatrain also gestures at the visual motif that eventually dominates the sonnet. The speaker measures the time left to him by measuring the distance between himself and death. The predicament of this speaker would be a familiar one to any Christian conscious of sin and doubtful of salvation. What is unusual is the supernatural clarity with which the speaker is able to perceive his predicament because his life has been incarnated into a sonnet structure: his status as a made object, a "work," is palpably apparent; the lines and turnings of his life are suddenly unfurled before him as plainly as a page of writing; and invisible entities and objects, even some "spectacle[s] of too much weight" (*Goodf*, l. 16) for human sight, are dreadfully and inescapably visible.

Further subtle distortions suggest that the normal rules of space, time, and visual perception have been suspended within the poem in order to achieve this disquieting visual enhancement: the poet's "end doth hast" towards him—that is, his "end," a purely temporal and abstract termination point (the end of the timeline and end of the poem) is suddenly visible to the speaker. And not just visible, but animate: instead of the speaker moving towards his end, he sees it coming towards *him*. Ironically but appropriately, however, the more the speaker tries to run away from his pursuer, the faster he runs towards death, carried to him by the rush and force of the line and syntax. The speaker claims to "run **from** death," yet "death **meets** [him] as fast"—which suggests that the speaker finds himself continually running towards death even as he tries to run away from it. This paradox is traceable through the deictic implications of "from" and "meet": the speaker is running *from* death (that is, he must have his back to death) but death "meets" the speaker (that is, must be

[27]Thanks to Sean McDowell for pointing out this implicit image.

*facing* the speaker, or standing ahead of the speaker, ready to receive him).[28] Death is pursuing the speaker, but not chasing him; like the end of the poem, death is waiting at the end of the speaker's journey, both the impetus for the speaker's rushing through the sonnet and the inevitable conclusion of it. This disorienting sense of circularity, suggesting some kind of collapse or explosion of the normal rules of directional space, is emphasized by the numerous instances of encircling repetitions throughout the quatrain: "Thou **hast** made me . . . myne end doth **hast**"; "Repair me **now**, for **now** my ende"; "I run from **death,** and **death** meets me" [my emphasis]. Like the speaker's terrifyingly chiastic race with death, as we proceed through the quatrain we keep re-meeting words that we thought we've left behind us, even as we descend, spiral-like, further down into the poem. By the end of this quatrain, there is no hint that the sonnet is anything but a dead end, except for the speaker's hope that God will somehow "repair" him (and by implication, his poem that has apparently gone so drastically wrong, turning his voyage for God into a race for his life).

As several readers have noted, this first quatrain takes pains to set up the tension between the speaker's mortal sense of imminent danger versus the eternal time in which he and God actually subsist: what seems like a matter of haste to the speaker is not so to God.[29] Achsah Guibbory observes that Donne often imagines God as not just separate from but actively working against the "natural, degenerative pattern of time" that carries all creation "downstream" of a more

[28]According to the OED, "meet" carries with it the specific connotation "to come face to face with or encounter" as well as "to arrive deliberately, or as previously arranged, in the presence of (an approaching person, etc.) from the opposite or a different direction." "meet, v." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115845>, accessed December 3, 2018. Death's ability to outrun his victims by waiting for them to run to him is not unique to this poem, as *Appointment in Samarra* and its foundational myths suggest.

[29]See for example Davies, p. 63; Robin Grove's comparison of the sonnet's form to an "hour-glass" in "Nature Methodiz'd," *Critical Review* 26 (1984): 67; and Frances M. Malpezzi's discussion of sacred and human time in "The Weight/Lessness of Sin: Donne's 'Thou Hast Made Me' and the Psychostatic Tradition," *South Central Review*, 4:2 (Summer 1987): 70–77.

perfect beginning in "a process of continual decay."[30] The sense of being harried downstream by a temporal flow that is not just inexorable but quickening is acutely conveyed in this quatrain through the speaker's staccato, repeated "hasts," and "nows"; the immediacy of the active verbs "runs" and "meets"; and the crushing finality of "yesterday," a synecdoche of everything time takes away from humanity. By contrast, the only action the speaker-poet ascribes to God is (appropriately enough) the present perfect "hast made me," which ambiguously locates God's act of making in the past and the present, and the interrogative "shall" leaving all future acts in doubtful suspense. Since the speaker-poet does not perceive God as actively present in his life or poem, God is likewise not taking action in any tense available to the speaker-poet.

While this temporal contrast undoubtedly works to emphasize the difference between mortal and divine perspectives of time, less often noticed is how the timeline of the sonnet (that is, the literal amount of time it takes the reader to move through the poem from the beginning to the end) is seamlessly folded into the speaker's temporal awareness. In other words, the urgency of the opening lines is meant to convey not only that the poet is "aware of the transience of life," but that he is aware of the brevity of the sonnet form.[31] As Stevie Davies observes, the speaker assumes that there is no "more than this brief span of fourteen lines in which to wrestle his soul from Hell to Heaven."[32] Faced with the sonnet's implacable deadline, the speaker-poet pours all of his energy into attempting to bring God into his presence, by bringing God into the poem, before it—and the speaker—ends. The second line's injunction, "Repaire me now, for now myne end do'th hast," attempts to set God a countdown that will expire not merely with the speaker's death, but at the end of the sonnet. "Repaire me *now*" [my emphasis] starts the clock for both the poem and the poet, and the inexorability of the sonnet's formal structure becomes indistinguishable from the speaker's inevitable and

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[30]Achsah Guibbory, *The Map of Time: Seventeenth Century English Literature and Ideas of Pattern in History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 97, 81.

[31]Malpezzi, p. 73.

[32]Stevie Davies, *John Donne* (Plymouth, UK: Northcote House Publishers, 1994), p. 63.

hastening end. The sonnet therefore becomes, for the purposes of the speaker's soul and salvation, his whole universe—a universe rigidly curtailed by the interior rules of a sonnet form, despite the poet's attempts to access the transformative temporal and spatial dimensions that exist (for example) for the reader of the sonnet. Indeed, in this limited instance, the temporal position of the reader to the poem is not unlike that of God: the reader can observe, but not be affected by, the interior rush of time and the steady funneling of the speaker's consciousness down through the quatrains. The reader can also, like God, contemplate all of the sonnet's times and individual moments in succession, out of order, or simultaneously, as she sees fit. However, unlike God, the reader cannot intervene to "repair" the speaker, and it is unclear exactly what "repair" is possible, even with divine intervention. It should be noted that, at this point in the sonnet, the speaker-poet has not specified *why* he is decaying: that is, he does not (as he does later) dwell on his sinfulness as the cause of his decay. In this first quatrain, it could be time itself, and decay as the manifestation of time's "destructive, dissolving effects,"[33] that the speaker is asking God to repair. The concept of "repair" when applied to as masterfully-constructed a sonnet as this one is equally baffling, especially as the primary fault that the speaker seems to object to is inherent in its form: one thing that a sonnet must do, sooner or later, is stop. The apparently impossibility of the task the speaker asks of God is brutally emphasized by being restated in terms of literary form: once a man is born, he begins to decay; once a sonnet starts, it begins to end. If we accept the initial limitations of the first quatrain and assume that the speaker is asking to be "repaired" so that he can escape decay and outrun death itself, how can this prayer be interpreted as anything but a request for an unmaking of the speaker and sonnet's essential form? Certainly for the reader, who can plainly see the sonnet's termination further down the page, such a miracle appears impossible.

The same queasy equation of poetic form and human soul is at play in the second quatrain, with the additional complexity of both the poet and reader's visual frames of reference becoming an explicit dimension of the (from the speaker's perspective) "decaying" poem:

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[33]Guibbory, p. 99.

> I dare not moue my dimme eyes any way,
> Dispaire behind, and death before doth cast
> Such terror, and my febled fleshe doth wast
> By Sin in it which towards hell doth weigh.
> (*HSMade*, ll. 5–8)

In this quatrain, the poet's "dimme eyes" become integral to the representational structure of the whole sonnet, which now consciously acknowledges, and attempts to synthesize, its own dual visual and verbal perceptive modes. To borrow W.J.T. Mitchell's term, Donne here makes his poem into an "imagetext," that is, a "composite, synthetic work" of verbal and visual media.[34] Although, as Mitchell observes, writing and printing, as language's only visual medium, "is an inseparable suturing of the visual and verbal, [and therefore] the 'imagetext' incarnate,"[35] I suggest that "Thou hast made me" is a more self-conscious "imagetext" due to the poem's deliberate exposure of the implicit visual dimension lurking within its explicit verbal structure. All written texts are inherently visual, but it is easy to overlook (so to speak) their visual capacities. Instead, Donne here underlines the inherently visual nature of writing by creating a speaker who would literally "look" for God within his own verse. While God remains invisible within the sonnet, the metaphoric and iconic powers of language enable the poet to see many other things that he now wishes he didn't. Here, the sense of supernatural perception hinted at in the first quatrain is fully developed, as the speaker suddenly encounters spiritual dangers as personified threats, as if he had inadvertently conjured up his own psychomachia. The poet's admission that "I dare not moue my dimme eyes any way," reiterates the perceived immediacy of his predicament and forces us to see it too. The speaker *is* literally surrounded by "dispaire behind" (in the first quatrain) and "death before" (as the first quatrain promised, waiting ahead to meet him at the end). More subtly, these lines contrive to echo the visual/verbal experience of the reader who, reading the lines and moving her eyes back and forth and up and down across the page, finds her own perspective lining up with the

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[34]W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 89–95.

[35]Mitchell, p. 89 n. 9.

speaker's. The speaker declares that he is cut off, before and behind, by "dispaire" and "death"; the reader, looking back to the opening lines and ahead to the inevitable conclusion, also sees despair and death surrounding the poet's horizon of vision, and comprehends the quatrain, as the poet does, as a cordoned space with nowhere to go but down. The claustrophobic effect is enhanced by the fact that God is not even verbally alluded to: every other section contains at least one address to "Thou," but in these four lines God is absent even as a possibility: the poet neither sees God nor speaks of him. This may be (as the speaker believes) because God is not there to see or be spoken to, but it is also a reflexive result of the sonnet's constriction of the poet's "dimme" sight to the sightlines of the interior quatrain. Initially, the speaker was looking for God to enter into his soul and sonnet and "repair it now," even as he was writing it, but by the second quatrain he doesn't dare to look for fear of seeing the shadows "cast" by his own words.

In describing how despair and death "cast" such terror that his speaker doesn't dare to look around him, Donne again, with careful deliberation and control, knots together the various capacities of the sonnet form that his speaker has failed to harness, and which are now hounding him through the octet. The concrete and weighty aspect that despair and death assume in their linguistic incarnation—substantial enough to chase the speaker out of the first quatrain, corner him in the second, and "cast" terror across the sonnet's lines—recalls both the Protestant suspicion of images (and their ability to assume disquieting and deceptive depth to the human eye and soul), and the inherently dangerous nature of poetic and figurative language. As Helen Wilcox observes, Donne was acutely aware of the necessity of metaphor "in writing or speaking about the divine," but also understood that the metaphoric was often at odds with clarity, visual and otherwise, being associated "with darkness rather than light, and secrecy rather than openness of expression."[36] The term "cast" implies not only a shadowy projection of death and despair that darkens the speaker's vision of both his past and future, but also carries overtones of something illusionary, a "trick" or "artifice," or even something

[36]Wilcox, 69, 76.

"casted" in the sculptural sense.[37] It is a term of artistry as well as action, and suggests that these casted terrors are literally products of the speaker's imagination, produced by the metaphoric and formal artistry of the sonnet itself. This construction of "cast" recalls the craft and creation in the opening lines (the poet is a "worke" that God has "made") and is retroactively reinforced by the sestet's later plea that God rescue him from the "art" of "our old subtile foe" (*HSMade*, ll. 13, 11). The revelation that the poet is not merely afraid of death but of a subtle foe's "art" that is chasing him down lends a degree of personalized malice to the figures of despair and death, whose terrors so blinker the speaker's vision that he can see nothing but hell looming before (and below) him. It is as if parts of the poem, like parts of the speaker's own soul, are "wast" with sin and turned against him, dragging him down with them. Finally, it is worth noting that "cast" can mean a twisted or impaired visuality: a "cast in the eye" describes a squint or permanent warping of the eye's line of vision.[38] If we read the quatrain with this meaning in mind, the speaker's lament that he cannot move his "dimme eyes" becomes more clearly an effect of the sonnet itself: his sight has been darkened, not lightened, by the things he has seen in his sonnet, which he created and is now (or so the speaker thinks) trapped within. Even if God has answered the poet's opening plea and is somehow present in the sonnet, the speaker cannot see him for the structure.

At this nadir, the poet seems to teeter on the edge of a precipice; he cannot move backward, is afraid to go forward, and despite (or because of) his enhanced ability to see his past and his future rolled out like a landscape full of shadowy enemies, can see no way of escape. This makes it all the more astonishing when, as the sonnet turns, the poet's perspective turns with it, momentarily throwing off the stagnant claustrophobic despondency of the second quatrain and escaping into the wider vistas of the sestet:

> Only thou art above; and when towards thee
> By thy leaue I can looke, I rise agayne.

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[37]"cast, n." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28530>, accessed 14 September 2015.

[38]Ibid.

> But our old subtile foe so tempteth mee
> That not one hower I can my selfe sustayne.
> (*HSMade*, 8–12)

Although the speaker has failed to bring God into the normal boundaries of the poem (the lines, letters, rhymes and images that circumscribe and limit the poem's world) the sudden expansion of the poet's vision beyond the horizons of the sonnet indicates God's presence in the "negative space" of the sonnet: namely, in the volta between octet and sestet. It is here that the full extent of the speaker's misperceptions of himself, his predicament, and God in the previous eight lines finally become clear. First and most crucially, Donne (as distinct from his floundering speaker) reminds the reader that his speaker was requesting an impossible, and indeed absurd, action: God cannot be summoned or brought into a sonnet, any more than God can be summoned into the confines of a human imagination. Any attempt by the speaker-poet to invent within the conventions of the sonnet a sort of intervention or divine descent would have been precisely that: an invention, and thus just one more image. By instead locating God in the turn, Donne adopts a uniquely formal method of expressing what Lawrence Benson, writing on the participation of the *Holy Sonnets* in the *via negativa* tradition, calls "the radical otherness of God."[39] With the introduction of God as a movement through space (but not a space itself), as part of the poem but not within the poem, as invisible, inarticulate, without word, form, or thought, and discernible only through its miraculous effect on the speaker's ability to "look," the poem's visual and spiritual horizons expand dramatically, and with them the reader and speaker's spiritual perceptions. The observation following the volta, "Only thou art above," is both a witty commentary on the placement of the invisible turn directly above line 8, and an indication that the speaker has acquired a new sense of the extra-narrative dimensions of the poem: until now, the poet has exclusively talked about things being before, behind, and below him; that he could look above himself (let alone "rise" through the power of that looking) never presented itself as a

[39]Lawrence Benson, "Talking to a Silent God: Donne's Holy Sonnets and the *Via Negativa*," *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 51.2 (1999): 95–109.

possibility to his imagination. The precision of the word choice "towards" recalls Donne's observations in *Essays in Divinity* that follow his vivid description of the divine odyssey:

> And though the faithfullest heart is not ever directly & constantly upon God, but that it sometimes **descends** also to Reason; yet it is thereby so departed from him, but that it still looks **towards** him, though not fully to him, as the compass is ever northward, though it decline and have often variations towards east and west."
>
> (*Essayes*, p. 24, emphases mine)

For one instant (as invisible and mysterious to us as it is to him) the speaker remembers that neither his eye nor his universe is bound by the seductive, gravitational pull of the sonnet form: eyes can move upwards as well as downwards, and can look for God out of the poem as well as within it. Not only is God "above," *only* God is above: that is, the poet's view of God (and implicitly the octet) during his moments of grace is unimpeded by any illusory "casts" of terror or images of death; for one moment the speaker can see his own poem as we see it, and with that new perception the poem permanently shifts towards a greater harmony of tone and content.

While the speaker cannot steadily behold God (the ubiquitous early modern image of God as the sun that enlightens the world even as it obscures itself through excess of light is certainly referenced in lines 8–10), his ability to look "towards" God is sufficient to temporarily free him from the misperception that he is imprisoned by his verse form, or at least give him hope of a reality, and salvation, beyond that misperception. This hope is strengthened by the fact that it is only by God's leave that the poet can look towards him at all. In "O my black soul," the speaker, searching for a route that will bring his soul back to God's grace, despairingly asks "But who shall giue thee that grace to begin?" (*HSBlack*, l. 10). In "Thou hast made me," we see at least a momentary deployment of the "grace to begin" in the poet's glance upwards, and, as is both typical and appropriate, neither the poet nor the reader is aware of the grace being granted until it has already begun to work. (While this analysis has focused primarily on "Thou hast made me" in isolation from its sequence, the illumination of this turn offers a suggestive reason for its frequent placement at the

head of the *Holy Sonnets* sequence, a point I will return to shortly.) As Richard Strier observes, the emphasis on God giving the poet "leave" to look is a precise reflection of the Protestant theological belief in "the self's impotence to initiate grace."[40] Donne, who writes so eloquently about the search for God as an act of daring discovery, and whose speaker in "Thou hast made me" is so entirely defined by his activeness in looking, searching, and perceiving on the more-than-mortal level the sonnet affords him, is nevertheless taken entirely by surprise by God's extra-textual grace in showing him a new way of journeying through and beyond his sonnet's visual subtlety.

Despite this revelatory reprieve and the divine illumination that the sonnet is inarguably (if indirectly) responsible for exposing, by the end of the third quatrain the speaker (true to his word) proves unable to "sustayne" in himself this exalted new perception and is again viewing his descent towards the sonnet's conclusion as a result of the temptations of "our old subtile foe." Considering the speaker's track record of misperception, it is worth pausing to consider who or what this "subtile foe" is, and whether it is actually the malicious force that the speaker at this moment perceives it to be. While it would be tempting to interpret the "subtile foe" as either some unredeemed aspect of the poet-speaker himself (not an unlikely possibility considering the foe's confessed "artfulness" and the generally self-divided nature of the poet throughout), or even (as George Herbert might suspect) the idolatrous beauties of the sonnet form itself, I would suggest that it is the conventional perspective, the safety of keeping in "the sight of land" as the speaker prepares to journey through this poem, and the rest of the sonnet sequence, that the speaker is afraid of falling victim to. For all of the subtlety and strength of the sonnet's multidimensional structure, it proved to be the speaker's own timidity and unwillingness to push beyond the structures of his sight and understanding that turned his sonnet against him, and kept God out of the poet's sphere of understanding and apprehension. So instead of launching off to search for God, the speaker "unwillingly left the sight of land," and submitted to the sonnet form's predetermined path. It is not until the volta that the

[40]Richard Strier, "John Donne Awry and Squint: The *Holy Sonnets*, 1608–1610," *Modern Philology* 86.4 (1989): 377.

speaker recognizes that it is himself, and not the sonnet, that has been dragging him down, and that there are "new worlds richer than the old" still to be discovered in its form.

As the couplet leaves open the possibility of God's intervening grace, it also underlines the speaker's new and uncertain perception of his lack of power over, or rather within, his own poem:

> Thy grace may winge me, to preuent his art
> And thou like Adamant, draw myne Iron hart.
> (*HSMade* 13–14)

On one level, the couplet leaves the speaker permanently abandoned within the poem: he (and we) are left in a state of suspense, waiting for a rescue that hasn't yet arrived and "may" not ever come. This is a satisfactory and suggestive conclusion for the sonnet, but not the soul trapped in it. Although critical opinion remains divided on whether the fact that "the resolution is presented as a possibility rather than an actuality"[41] bodes well or ill for the speaker's final salvation, the keynote of the couplet is that the sonnet ends before the speaker's story does, leaving the speaker's spiritual dilemma and poetic structure, which for the first eight lines of the poem the poem were virtually indistinguishable, finally incongruent and discordant. This discordance is emphasized in the telling phrase "preuent his art" appearing in the penultimate line of the sonnet. "Prevent" here has one clear theological connotation of "to go before [a person] with spiritual guidance and help . . . so as to predispose a person to repentance, faith, and good works" that hangs together coherently with the poem as a whole, echoing back to the third quatrain's outburst of invisible grace.[42] However, the suggestive context of the phrase "to preuent **his art**" [my emphasis] invites a wider range of plausible, variant meanings: "to anticipate" or "act in advance of" the enemy's art (that is, to fulfill after all the request of the first quatrain and save the speaker); but also "to outrun, outstrip" (helping the poet finally beat death in their foot race); or to "surpass" or "excel" (thus "winging" above the sonnet's art not through rejection, but through

[41]Strier, p. 377.

[42]"prevent, v." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151073>, accessed 31 August 2017.

achieving a still greater and more complete level of poetic artistry than the sonnet itself).[43] That the poem can ring through all of these changes, each distinct and yet dovetailing with a well-established thematic thread, is further proof of how carefully the sonnet's overlapping dimensions of meaning and perception have been superimposed and combined. As Ramie Targoff observes, this ending "provides the poem with formal, but not theological closure."[44] However, I would suggest that the conclusion of "Thou hast made me" finally undermines the claim that "the sonnet [form] itself supplies what is lacking in [Donne's] desire for reassurance from God."[45] The entire point of leaving the poet-speaker waiting on the precipice for God to pull him back from the brink is to demonstrate the limitations of the sonnet form when understood from the temporal, linear perspective that the speaker initially understood it to be: the sonnet, from such a perspective, can only go so far and no further. But as the overlapping and circling temporal and spatial courses and currents of the sonnet show to readers who are able to view it as a "flat map" (*Sickness,* l. 14), the sonnet's journey towards God is multilinear, with the ends touching the beginnings, and grace existing prior to and outside of the speaker's need for it. That the speaker only barely is able to perceive these possibilities is one more demonstration of how easily explorers searching for God in "new expressions" (*Sidney,* l. 2) can fail along the way. This sonnet thus reinforces both the risks, and potential rewards, of leaving the safety of the shoreline to go searching for God in the deep waters of poetic imagination. After his ordeals in the opening quatrains, that the speaker is aware of the dangerous and damaging effects of his poetic experiment, and has hopes for a rescue beyond the last line of the sonnet, is triumph enough. It is also a compelling introduction to the *Holy Sonnets* sequence, if we accept the placing of "Thou hast made me" at the head of the sequence as correct. Even without this placement requirement, the fact that this poem frequently appears as part of a sequence, often closely followed by "As due by many Titles," a poem with compelling echoes and connections to "Thou has made

[43]Ibid.
[44]Targoff, p. 112.
[45]Targoff, p. 124.

me," finally suggests that this poem is not meant to be the conclusion of a poetic search for God, but the first of many attempts. That the speaker of "Thou hast made me" is unable to control his vehicle of divine revelation does not mean that a "new world richer than the old" is beyond the reach of better mariners who journey through the same poem; even the speaker's misperceptions and mistakes may become part of other voyages. Indeed, as Donne suggests in the section of the *Essayes* with which this article began, the journey of seeking new expressions for God is incapable of closure: "For if thou couldest express all which thou seest of God, there would be something presently beyond that. Not that God growes, but faith doth" (*Essayes*, p. 26).

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