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"that sacrifice, which ransom'd us": The Debt of Salvation in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward"

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Donne's poem "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" encourages conflation of poet and speaker by biographers and critics alike. The overlap is certainly tempting: the speaker narrates his struggle to ride physically westward while his "Soules form bends toward the East" (10)[1] to the scene of the crucifixion on Good Friday; meanwhile, Donne himself—always struggling to reconcile body and soul—might have been riding westward on horseback on Good Friday in 1613 when he wrote the poem.[2] Critics use the tidiness of this

[1] Quotations of Donne's poetry come from Donald R. Dickson's *John Donne's Poetry* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2007).

[2] Margaret Maurer and Dennis Flynn examine the subheadings of two manuscript copies of the poem given to Nathaniel Rich for insight into its compositional circumstances: "Rich's headings denote that the speaker of *Goodf* is to be imagined traveling in a southwesterly direction from London [. . .] towards Exeter in Devon, in the 'West Countrey.' On the other hand, Donne's editors and biographers have all connected *Goodf* with an assumption supported by no extant heading that in April 1613, on his way to Wales, Donne's itinerary was northwest from London, pausing north of Coventry at Polesworth, the estate of his friend Henry Goodere, on the way to Montgomery" (67). Margaret Maurer and Dennis Flynn, "The Text of *Goodf* and John Donne's Itinerary in April 1613," *Textual Cultures* 8:2 (Fall 2013): 50-94. Perhaps the phrase "span the Poles" (line 21) was inspired in part by his departure from Polesworth. Donald Dickson's comparisons of manuscript

overlap to offer a wide range of interpretations of the speaker's (and Donne's) journey. A. B. Chambers describes it as "a departure from the Christian path, a turning from light to enter the ways of darkness,"[3] while Barbara Lewalski reads the exercise as "the speaker's failure to conduct a traditional 'deliberate' Good Friday meditation."[4] Joe Glaser favors a conversion narrative, claiming that the poem "provides the clearest evidence we have as to Donne's attitudes as he moved toward ordination in the Anglican Church,"[5] and Achsah Guibbory argues that "Donne's description of his westward journey works on literal and metaphorical levels, suggestive of his leaving the Roman Church, in which he could indeed 'see' (11) the crucifix and pictures of Christ on the cross, which now (in a reformed church) he can only see in his 'memory' (34)."[6] Frances Malpezzi reads the poem's physical symbolism to support how the journey describes "the paradigmatic earthly pilgrimage through life to death and eternal life in the celestial city of the new Jerusalem."[7] William Halewood's interpretation resonates with that of Chambers and departs from Lewalski's in believing the subject to be "a radically Protestant meditation on sin and salvation—thus *about* sin and salvation, not about meditation."[8] To this rich and varied body of criticism, I hope to add another perspective by understanding the speaker's persistent self-referentiality to be central

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subheadings reveal the possibility that "Donne travelled first to Exeter before heading to Montgomery Castle in Wales in early April 1613" (98). Donald R. Dickson, "The Text of Donne's Good Friday Meditation," *John Donne Journal* 32 (2013): 87-106.

[3] A.B. Chambers, "Goodfriday, 1613, Riding Westward: The Poem and the Tradition," *ELH* 28:1 (March 1961): 31-53, quotation from p. 48.

[4] Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 278.

[5] Joe Glaser, "'Goodfriday, 1613': A Soul's Form," *College Literature* 13:2 (Spring 1986): 168-176, quotation from p. 169.

[6] Achsah Guibbory, "Donne and Apostasy," in Shami, Flynn, and Hester (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 677.

[7] Frances M. Malpezzi, "'As I Ride': The Beast and His Burden in Donne's 'Goodfriday,'" *Religion and Literature* 24:1 (Spring 1992): 23-31, quotation from p. 26.

[8] William Halewood, "The Predicament of the Westward Rider," *Studies in Philology* 93:2 (Spring 1996): 218-228, quotation from p. 218.

to the poem. Considering the poem as the speaker's exercise in rehearsing and establishing selfhood offers powerful mediated insight into Donne's own negotiation of power and identity.

The speaker's indebtedness to his God courses through the poem and complicates his gratitude, which, in turn, creates a barrier to his self-definition. While the Bible offers instruction for borrowing and giving practices—as in Psalm 37:21, "The wicked borroweth and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth"[9]—it fails to capture the grey area of indebtedness that salvation provokes in the mortal devotee. For Donne, the surrounding world reflects Christ's sacrifice, constantly reminding him of both his unquantifiable debt to God and his inability to settle this impossible obligation. Across poems, Donne's speakers dramatize this pervasive phenomenon, as in "The Crosse":

> Look down, thou spiest out crosses in small things;
> Look up, thou seest birds raised on crossed wings;
> All the globe's frame, and spheres, is nothing else
> But the meridians crossing parallels. (21-24)

Crosses appear everywhere the speaker looks, even undergirding the celestial foundation of his world. The poem's speaker then elevates the symbol and brings it to bear directly on its referent—"Material crosses, then, good physic be / But yet the spiritual have chief dignity" (25-26)—thus bridging to the more profound sacrifice that the physical cross embodies. The "chief dignity" of the cross's spiritual significance is what Donne's speakers cannot aspire to match, and in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," it becomes the source of the speaker's weighty burden, his self-definitional despair.

The speaker's sense of obligation in "Goodfriday" prevents him from articulating a satisfying response to the crucifixion—and to his redemption[10] more generally—thus leaving him to dramatize his

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[9] *The Bible. Authorized King James Version*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
[10] My gratitude to one of the anonymous *John Donne Journal* readers for pointing out the financial implications of the word "redemption" as not merely a) "deliverance from sin and damnation, esp. by the atonement of Christ; salvation," but also, in the context of indebtedness, b) "a recompense; a

complicated indebtedness rather than his gratitude.[11] This focus encourages a closer look at the speaker's loaded phrase "that sacrifice, which ransom'd us" (32) and its centrality to his failures of commemoration and self-articulation. In the context of the line, the clause "which ransom'd us" reads initially as an afterthought, an addendum to the sentiment that feels finished at "sacrifice." Indeed "sacrifice" would be a fitting endpoint, especially as it would naturally demand that the reader pause at the emotional heft of Christ's death. Yet the speaker allows the clause "which ransom'd us" to follow, affording it the line's prominent ending position. The self-direction of this line betrays the speaker's preoccupation with the condition of mortal indebtedness brought about by the crucifixion, a central theme that offers a new interpretive perspective on the poem. Donne's speaker struggles with the dark reality that, as Claudia Card explains, "It is a disadvantage to be in debt,"[12] even when the debt means enjoying the advantage of redemption. The speaker of "Goodfriday" ultimately struggles with what Card theorizes as the relationship of self-respect to indebtedness:

> One's self-respect demands that one do what one can to pay off one's debts, to conclude relationships that subject one to non-reciprocal constraints. One proves oneself reliable and maintains self-respect in extricating oneself from such relationships.[13]

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compensation." "Redemption, N." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6056227719.

[11] Paul Harland argues that Donne's passion works explore the relationship between the devotee's inward- and outward-focused responses to the crucifixion: "These works, replete with the imagery of reflection, enact the drama of the ego breaking out of the prison of destructive self-preoccupation into a liberated state of true self-love which best expresses itself as willing and disinterested giving" (162). Paul W. Harland, "'A True Transubstantiation': Donne, Self-Love, and the Passion," in Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (eds.), *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*. Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995.

[12] Claudia Card, "Gratitude and Obligation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25:2 (April 1988): 115-127, quotation from p. 123.

[13] Card, p. 123.

The non-reciprocal relationship between God and devotee, compounded by Christ's sacrifice, creates for Donne a complex *debt of gratitude*; whereas Herbert focuses more on developing his gratitude (as in lines 1-2 of "Gratfulnesse": "Thou that hast giv'n so much to me, / Give one thing more, a gratefull heart"[14]) Donne's speakers seem caught instead in their condition of indebtedness to God for Christ's sacrifice.[15]

"Goodfriday" begins in a detached, expansive, philosophical frame that both dwarfs the speaker and showcases his persuasive facility:

> Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
> The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
> And as the other Spheares, by being growne
> Subject to forraigne motion, lose their owne,
> And being by others hurried every day,
> Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
> Pleasure or business, so, our Soules admit
> For their first mover, and are whirld by it. (1-8)

The regularity of the logical construction that opens the poem—"Let" *this*, "then" *that*—quickly collapses under the expansion of the idea. The expectation that the continuation "And as" (3) sets up does not find its corollary *then that* phrase; instead, the conceit builds to accommodate more information, signaled by "And being" (5), and again hangs without a resultant action until the final, syntactically confusing "obey" (6) at the end of the thought. The speaker underscores his idea of the soul's derailment by posing and then himself destabilizing a

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[14] Quotations of Herbert's poetry come from Helen Wilcox's *The English Poems of George Herbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Raymond-Jean Frontain attributes this contrast between Donne and Herbert to Herbert's acceptance of God's grace, noting that Donne, "did not have the comfort of an inevitably present God as Herbert had" (p. 90). Raymond-Jean Frontain, "'With Holy Importunitie, With a Pious Impudiencie': John Donne's Attempts to Provoke Election," *Quidditas* 13.1 (1992): 85-102.

[15] This reading departs from Timothy Rosendale's contention that, in the poem, ". . . there does seem to be a reciprocal sort of dynamic, in which a crisscrossing, remembering gaze simultaneously constitutes both the crucifixion and the devotional speaker" (p. 273). Timothy Rosendale, "Wrong Turns in 'Goodfriday, 1613,'" *John Donne Journal* 31 (2012): 263-282.

straightforward recognizable verbal frame. Heather Dubrow's study of spatial deixis in early modern English lyrics can be applied to the complicated "this" that ends the first line of the poem. Dubrow unpacks the same deictic term in Donne's first line of "The Flea,"—"Marke but this Flea, and marke in this"—arguing, "On one level, the words allude to the material flea, but at the same time the text now broadens the referents to include what might be termed flea-as-heuristic-device, the general issues that the poem introduces, the text itself, and perhaps even the conventional mores of the subgenre of seduction poems."[16] In "Goodfriday," the speaker's "in this" of "Let mans Soule be a Sphere, and then, in this" performs the same function: direct reference to the sphere that is the soul, and indirect references to the poem's greater themes, as well as to the poem itself. These subversions leave the reader with the sense that the speaker exercises a highly sophisticated mastery of mechanics and language. Even the pretense of organizing and containing the amorphous, enigmatic soul into a shape—or, in another register, into language—suggests the speaker's belief that the soul resists organization, containment, and control. At the end of this eight-line segment, the speaker conveys a twofold expression: first, his potent mastery of language; and, secondly, the misdirection of that mastery as it betrays his impotence in the greater themes he explores.

Despite his powerful facility with language, the passive constructions in this section reflect the speaker's feeling of powerlessness as his soul encounters outside stimulus. He emphasizes the soul's lack of agency in lines 3-4 with the phrase "by being growne subject to foreign motion." Carefully avoiding active voice, "growing," he instead favors "being grown" as it accommodates "subject to," a phrase that explicitly denotes passivity.[17] He further highlights submission with the emphatic supplement "by others" (5) when "being hurried" alone would have conveyed the thought. The context of this

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[16] Heather Dubrow, *Deixis in the Early Modern English Lyric: Unsettling Spatial Anchors Like 'Here,' 'This,' 'Come'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.

[17] Anthony Bellete describes this poem as "the most carefully and deliberately wrought of all Donne's devotional poems" (347). Anthony F. Bellete, "Little Worlds Made Cunningly: Significant Form in Donne's 'Holy Sonnets' and 'Goodfriday, 1613,'" *Studies in Philology* 72:3 (July 1975): 322-347.

section establishes that the "foreign motion" (4) and "pleasure or business" (7) that steer the soul off course are negative influences. These forces cause chaos, having a "hurried" (5) and "whirld" (8) effect; additionally, their impact goes against the nature of souls, inciting them to "lose their own" (4) motion and disobey their "natural form" (6). The speaker's foundational claim dictates that devotion should govern the soul's path, and its elaboration explains that foreign or earthly motions interfere with that natural path. Inflecting this binary, however, is the sense of powerlessness that comes from the inability to control one's soul as it falls prey to secular, or even devotional, forces. The narrative content also reflects the speaker's meta-commentary about his own agency, as he finds his power in language, a resource that collapses back on himself, and consequently, fails to interact constructively with God.

The poem goes on situate the speaker's own concrete station as a devotee on Good Friday within the introductory philosophical frame and, with the hinge word "hence," to highlight their situational incommensurability:

> Hence is't, that I am carried towards the West
> This day, when my Soules form bends toward the East.
> There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
> And by that setting endless day beget;
> But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
> Sinne had eternally benighted all. (9-14)

The passive phrase "I am carried" (9) works both to create continuity with the previous section and to break with the philosophical abstraction of the opening by announcing the speaker's presence in the moment. His first use of the first-person in the active voice, "I should see" (11), conveys the immediacy of his vision. Though couched in the subjunctive/imperative *should*, the section finds detail and specificity in the modifier "this" of "this Crosse" (13). A less precise choice would have been "the Crosse," or even "his Crosse," but "this" suggests that the speaker has envisioned the crucifixion before and that the scene lingers in his immediate mind. A quick summary of this section might read as follows: The speaker travels westward when his soul longs to be in the east, the site of the crucifixion; further, a state of sinfulness (night) would have been the mortal condition had Christ's death not

prevented it. Here the reader bears witness to the speaker's understanding of salvation and acknowledgment of his failure to commemorate the day properly.

A close reading of the speaker's unparallel language in this section demonstrates his complicated gratitude. The phrase "endlesse day" (12)—which, on the surface, connotes the state of salvation that Christ engendered—resonates with "eternally benighted" (14), even though the latter imparts an action. Seemingly opposite (endless day as salvation and eternal night as sin), these phrases share the idea of infinity through the terms "endless" and "eternally." Considered alongside "hurried *every day*" from line 5, a sense of frustration in the hopelessness of a state (even a positive one) that is "endless" or "eternal" pervades the sentiment. Comparing "endlesse day" and "eternally benighted" in terms of the states that they express also strengthens their association. While "benighted" in context functions as a verb, taken in an alternate sense, the condition it captures—that of a world with sin—indicates a circumstance rather than a specific moment. "Day," on the other hand, can be measured, contained, and—perhaps most importantly—moved beyond. In this way, "day*time*" or "day*light*" would have better complimented "benighted" as a vague, positive condition; yet, the speaker chooses the more urgent, immediate, specific term "day," suggesting that Good Friday—with Christ on *this* cross—lives endlessly in his mind.[18] "*This* crosse" (13) echoes "*this* Day" (10) to suggest the speaker's own cross to bear, the endless debt that he owes to Christ and that he cannot possibly repay.

The concentration on the speaker's specific account of the Passion ("*this* Crosse") conveys a subjective, personal description of the scene that supports the poem's focus on him. Here the speaker diverges from the nearly contemporary Passion works of Richard Crashaw, who repeatedly emphasizes the outward potential impact of narrations of the scene, as in "Charitas Nimia": "Why should the white / Lamb's bosom write / The purple name / Of my sin's shame?" (57-60).[19] While Crashaw does reference himself as everyman sinner in the excerpt, he places the

[18] The homophones "Sunne" and *son* (Christ) strengthen this connection between Christ and day(light).

[19] Quotations from Crashaw's poetry come from George Walton Williams's *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

lingering focus on Christ's pain (the action and impact) rather than on himself as its agent.[20] On the other hand, the speaker of "Goodfriday" is himself the central subject of the crucifixion, as the next section demonstrates:

> Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
> Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
> What a death were it then to see God dye?
> It made his own Leiutenant Nature shrinke,
> It made his footstool crack, and the Sunne wink. (15-20)

The core of the sentiment is its impact on the speaker, who couches "that spectacle" between phrases signaling his self-consideration, "dare *I* almost be glad" and "too much weight for *mee*" (emphasis added). Again, the more generous reading of the speaker's sentiment would interpret "too much weight" as too emotionally heavy or psychologically grave for the speaker to see or bear. Yet, these lines could also, alternatively or simultaneously, signal the agitation the speaker feels at his powerlessness in the situation. "Dare I almost be glad" allows the speaker to test out different, potentially inappropriate, reactions to the Passion, and it points to his layers of feelings about living in the aftermath of salvation. The speaker assesses his predicament in lines 17 and 18: If seeing God, for mortals, means dying, then what does seeing God die mean? The question that he poses in line 18 does more than merely point to a theological query; it highlights the incommensurability of power in God's and man's stations and the speaker's discomfort with the imbalance.

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[20] Lorraine Roberts argues that Crashaw's self-investment, denoted through the use of personal pronouns, is a product of his effort to create a communal, liturgical voice: "The poet's voice, while speaking from the position of the personal 'I,' is really the communal voice of any participant in the commemoration of Christ's death and its meaning" (77). Lorraine M. Roberts, "Crashaw's Sacred Voice" (pp.66-79) in John Roberts (ed.) *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990.

The next section develops the speaker's own experience as potential witness to the Passion while situating him in the context of the grand scope of the opening:

> Could I behold those hands which span the Poles
> And tune all spheres at once peirc'd with those holes?
> Could I behold that endless height which is
> Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
> Humbled below us? Or that blood which is
> The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
> Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
> By God, for his apparel, rag'd, and torne? (21-28)

Echoing "this Day" (10) and "this Crosse" (13), the phrases "*those* hands" (21) and "*those* holes" (22) appear at the exact center of the poem to add a sense of specificity to the imposing wider world of "Poles" (21) and "spheares" (22). By juxtaposing these two realms—one vague/macro and one detailed/micro—the speaker shows the difference in scale of divine and human existence. He notes that, even in mortal form, Christ accomplishes feats unavailable to men, such as enriching dust with his blood to form dirt.[21] He also proves that he has meditated on this image: this day, this cross, those hands, and those holes in that specific mortal/divine hybrid body. Thus Christ's "endless height" (23) resonates with "endless day" (12) as a presence endlessly in his mind because of his powerlessness to cope with its enormity. In this way, the poem allows the speaker to share the devotee's general frustration over endlessness, a condition that he combats by locating himself on a particular journey at a particular time as he fixates on Christ at the pivotal point in his mortal life.[22] With this gesture, though, he

[21] Malpezzi notes the 17th-century belief in the curative properties of Christ's blood, explaining, "In medieval and Renaissance art there are a number of visual representations of Christ's blood making dirt of dust. Usually at the scene of the crucifixion the ground is dried and cracked around the cross but dark and damp at its foot, and sometimes fertile with flowers as the blood of the second Adam renews the dry souls of those who share in Adam's sin" (p. 27).

[22] Dubrow's use of Mary Galbriath's Deictic Shift Model is useful here in noting the distinction between historical and fictional worlds, as Galbraith argues, ". .

likens himself to Christ as both men suffer their fates: one as a powerful savior who ends eternal sin and one as a powerless devotee who lives with the guilt of eternal salvation.

The repeated interrogative "Could I behold" resonates with the earlier phrase "Dare I almost be glad" and with a similar sentiment in "The Crosse," a meditation on the everyday symbolic pervasiveness of the Passion. The speaker of "The Crosse" begins by asking, "Since Christ embraced the cross itself, dare I / His image, th'image of His cross, deny?" (1-2) and later echoing, "Who from the picture would avert his eye?" (7). The speaker implies a sense of obligation that the devotee experiences: of course the speaker dare not deny the image (and goes on to let it unfold), and of course no one would avert his eye from the picture. Yet, considered together, the prominence of the question as the poem's opener, its reiteration, and the repeated appearance of "Could I behold" in "Goodfriday" suggest Donne's interest (across poems and speakers) in exploring the power of denial. Speaking to the more implicit insinuation of the question in "The Crosse," Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen argues:

> [I]t also opens up the possibility of averting one's eyes from Christ's agony in the first place, and this possibility has already affected the speaker's own spiritual perspective at the outset. Indeed, the speaker's inner distance from affective devotion to the Passion is in fact the central reality of the poem.[23]

In each poem, the speaker's self-referentiality (especially as it involves his agency) creates this "inner distance from affective devotion" by featuring an inward self-focus instead of an outward expression that would center on—and potentially afford an affective engagement with—Christ.

. fictional narration requires the reader to imagine deictic fields in which HERE, NOW, and SELF coordinates are transposed from their usual anchorage in the 'I' into an anchorage in the narrative text" (*Subjectivity in the Novel: A Phenomenological and Linguistic Approach to the Narration of Childhood Self* [State University of New York at Buffalo, 1990], p. 46).

[23] Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), p. 110.

In contrast to Crashaw, who creates and savors opportunities for affective engagement, the speaker of "Goodfriday" seems to avoid affective piety; this appears strikingly in his evocation of Mary. Much like his self-directed focus on the scene of the crucifixion, the speaker's allusion to Mary serves to develop his own inner feelings rather than to reflect on hers:

> If on these things I durst not look, durst I
> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
> Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us. (29-32)

The speaker's reference to Mary's presence during the Passion contrasts with Crashaw's sustained interest in Mary's role as Christ's grieving mother. However, compared to Crashaw's portrayals of Marian devotion—inspiring an affective, visceral, and sympathetic contemplation of Christ's mother's suffering (exemplified by their "discoursing alternate wounds to one another" in *Sancta Maria Dolorum*)—the speaker of "Goodfriday" offers a more intellectually bent, sterile account of her role. References to Mary serve to strengthen the speaker's feeling of subjection rather than to highlight her maternal grief.[24] The phrases "Gods partner" and "furnish'd thus *half* of that Sacrifice" depict the Passion in economic terms as they parcel out ownership and quantify suffering. For the speaker, then, Mary alone appears to have surmounted the obstacle that human devotees face (and the source of his frustration): their lack of power that would enable them to take part meaningfully in Christ's sacrifice.

The most telling phrase in this section, however, and the one that governs the spirit of the poem, includes the continuation of the line: "that Sacrifice, *which ransom'd us*" (32). Well-suited to the section's earlier economic terms, the idea of ransom elaborates on the concept to suggest the power imbalance that plagues the speaker. The "us" that ends the line creates a sense of an us-and-them dichotomy in which the speaker finds himself to be an "us" wishing to be a part of "them." By comparison, Crashaw too expresses a desire to be part of an "us" in some

[24] While the single adjective "miserable" (30) describes Mary, the representation of her grief centers on its impact on the speaker rather than on herself.

Passion poetry; for example, he explicitly begs for a portion of grief in *Sancta Maria Dolorum*: "Come, wounds! come, darts! / Nail'd hands! And piercèd hearts! / Come, your whole selves, sorrow's great Son and Mother, / Nor grudge a younger brother / Of griefs his portion" (75-9). Like the speaker of "Goodfriday," Crashaw (here the "younger brother") quantifies Passion suffering and longs to carve out a portion of it for himself. The spirited eagerness of Crashaw's sentiment, however, lacks the bitterness and discontent of the speaker in "Goodfriday," who focuses on his obligation rather than on the expression of astonished gratitude conveyed by Crashaw's line "Nail'd hands! And piercèd hearts!" (76). Ransom is the consequence of salvation that the speaker of "Goodfriday" mourns, a ransom that haunts him "endlessly" from the position of a mortal devotee who cannot pay his debt.

The poem's final lines introduce graphic imagery of self-directed violence. As in some of the Holy Sonnets, the speaker's imperatives provide a locus for the desire that he cannot otherwise place or contain:

> Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
> They'are present yet unto my memory,
> For that looks towards them; and thou lookst towards mee,
> O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
> I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face. (33-42)

The sense of movement that the speaker creates with the phrase "as I ride" is undercut by "present yet unto my memory," which recalls the static perpetuity of the endless day. Since the speaker cannot actually draw upon a memory of the day, perhaps "these things" refers in another way to his burden, the "ransom," rather than only to the details of the crucifixion. The speaker's sudden apostrophe to Christ, "O Saviour" (36), gestures to the possibility of a conversation, dialogue, or exchange; yet, in this context of unequal partnership, it lays a foundation for his shocking declaration "I turne my back to thee" (37). Desperate to engage in self-assertion through action, the speaker resorts to

presenting himself as a pious failure seeking Christ's punishment. As a disappointment, he may interact with God, from whom he demands chastisement: "O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee, / burne off my rusts, and my deformity" (39-40). His series of imperatives allows him to create a sense of self by asserting his presence meaningfully and physically, allowing him to escape the burdens of endless contemplation and hopeless grief. According to Raymond-Jean Frontain, a source of the agitation in Donne's religious works is the speakers' distance from God's process of bestowing grace, especially given the "absolute importance conferred upon the individual's faith in the grace of a God no longer accessible through the ritual work of the church, and whose external wrath toward those not saved was beyond the mitigation both of the church and of individual action."[25] The inaccessibility of God, potentially coupled with the mystery of His grace, disempowers the speaker of "Goodfriday," and frustrates his affective engagement with Christ's death. Not Christ but the speaker, therefore, forms the site of affective piety in the poem, and the reader is in the position of pondering the speaker's predicament rather than grieving for Christ.

The centrality of the speaker's experience of living in the aftermath of the Passion, rather than of Christ's experience of being crucified, suggests his driving desire to define himself in relation to Christ. Nancy Selleck writes that Donne's use of physical imagery is "often degrading in Bakhtin's regenerative sense" as it works "in the interest of renewal or salvation."[26] She continues:

> In its own enlivening way, then, Donne's intensely physical imagery brings grotesque realism into the realms of both love poetry and Christian doctrine. And in this way, his emphasis on the body is not a means of self-involvement or self-assertion, but a way of representing the self's connection and even subjection to *other* bodies, souls, and persons—including the 'persons' of God.[27]

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[25] Frontain, p. 85.
[26] Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 59.
[27] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Selleck's explanation might apply more readily to Crashaw, who also demonstrates a desire for self-destruction in the interest of rebirth. "The Flaming Heart," for example, ends with his appeal to St. Teresa: "Leave nothing of my Selfe in me. / Let me so read thy life, that I / Unto all life of mine may dy" (106-108). Begging to become empty of himself and porous to St. Teresa's visionary instruction, Crashaw models proper engagement with religious texts for his readers: "Let all thy scatter'd shafts of light, that play / Among the leaves of thy larg Books of day, / Combin'd against this Brest at once break in / And take away from me my self and sin" (87-90). Selleck's reading accommodates Crashaw's approach to forge a meaningful, physically charged relationship with others who may bridge the gap between the mortal and divine realms (here the visionary St. Teresa). However, the reading fails to capture the complexity of the speakers' plights in Donne's Passion poetry. In order to achieve a meaningful connection (physical, emotional, spiritual), or even subjection, Donne's speaker in "Goodfriday" must realize and express his identity, which—judging by his frustrations—seems a punishing task in light of his powerlessness.[28]

Schoenfeldt addresses the irony in Donne's speaker's empowering disavowal of power, noting,

> The poem's conclusion pointedly juxtaposes the speaker's horrified refusal to look at God with a sense of the mortal

[28] Richard Strier argues that Donne's desire to self-identify is linked to his rejection of Calvinist doctrine:

> When Jesus looks toward Donne from the cross, Jesus presumably knows at whom He was looking. He knows Donne as a sinner, as an imperfect being, but He does know Donne then—as an actual, historical person. The real meaning of the prayer and fantasy seems to be closer to something like 'That I may know me.' Donne does not want to know himself as a fallen person vis-à-vis God—Calvin's prescription for self-knowledge. Donne wants to know himself as perfect (23).

Richard Strier, "Going in the Wrong Direction: Lyric Criticism and Donne's 'Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward,'" *George Herbert Journal* 29:1 and 2 (Fall 2005/Spring 2006): 13-27.

> subject's complete visibility before God. The speaker cannot return God's gaze, he says, until God has properly punished him. Although Foucault and feminist film theory have taught us to conceptualize the gaze as an inherently intrusive, even oppressive phenomenon, Donne was fascinated by a contrary notion: the immense comfort that can emerge from a sense of complete visibility before God, and the corollary fear that God will not deign to bestow such a gaze upon him.[29]

The argument that the speaker desires to be the object of God's gaze may be extended, in this case, to his sense of a constructive identity. The endpoint of the speaker's imperatives, that God "mayst know" (42) him, suggests his determination to be acknowledged. Whereas Crashaw writes from the other perspective—that of desiring to know God—the speaker of "Goodfriday" yearns for God to know him, a self-centered focus that points to his own fears about more than just his lack of agency, but at their core, about his unsubstantiated identity.

Critics interpret the final line of the poem—"and I'll turne my face"—in multiple ways: as a turning away from sin and toward grace, as a transition from death to eternal life, as a symbolic embracing of the Passion and its significance.[30] Donne likely meant to yield many possible interpretations, even conflicting ones, at once. One that has not generated critical conversation, though, is its bearing on the previous line, "Restore thine image" (41). Immediately following the directive "Burne off my rusts, and my deformity" (40), "Restore thine image" may continue the same thread of the coin metaphor. Glaser's explanation of the "fires of reminting" provides helpful context for the identity implications of the coin metaphor:

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[29] Michael C. Schoenfeldt, "'That Spectacle of Too Much Weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31:3 (Fall 2001): 561-584, quotation from p. 568.

[30] For a detailed discussion of the poem's manuscript history and editorial changes, see Dickson. In particular, Dickson favors the reading of "tune" (rather than "turn") in line 22, as it meaningfully contrasts with the actions of "turn" in lines 37 and 42: ". . . the image of the cosmic Christ tuning the spheres maintains a distinction between His action and those that Donne must undertake in lines 37-38 . . . and in line 42" (p. 95).

> They not only burnt away rusts and deformities, but offered a fresh start. Each piece of money, no matter how battered, emerged bright and clean, ready for a new career.[31]

Though Glaser's explication of the coin metaphor supports his interpretation of how the poem relates to Donne's life at the time of its composition, the idea of reminting as a means of forging a new identity (out of the same material substance) also informs the final promise "I'll turne my face."[32]

The speaker may, on some level, be advocating for Christ to permit or perform a version of *imitatio Christi* through him. The punishment of violent burning for which he begs—to remove his sins and moral deficiencies—imparts a sense of brutality that connects him to Christ through the physical abuse they both endure (or seek to endure) on Good Friday. Immediately after his supplication for punishment, the speaker pleads, "Restore thine image," with the lingering suggestion that he do so ". . . in me." This interpretation would imbue "and I'll turne my face" with a meaning of change rather than directional shift. In this vein, the speaker proposes that his face be changed in the likeness of Christ, a proposition that reflects a desire to inhabit a position of equality, or at least a position of some agency. Alternatively, "Restore thine image" with the possible addendum ". . . *in me*" may signify the speaker's desire to revisit the scene of the Passion by returning to a time when sinners needed redemption. If so, this reenactment casts the speaker in the role of Christ, as the knowing recipient of abuse. Either way, the speaker entertains the idea of imitating Christ—a bold gesture that indicates his discomfort with his lack of agency as a human devotee living in the aftermath of salvation.

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[31] Glaser details this process as he relates it to identity, "But the more thoroughgoing process implied at the end of 'Goodfriday' involves a total change of identity, a change Donne often prayed for. Bad money—clipped, hollowed, defaced, worn, or corroded coin—was called in, melted down, purified, and reminted as bullion. The fires of this reminting appealed strongly to Donne" (p. 174).

[32] Glaser continues by concluding, "In 1613, worn down by unresolved feelings of guilt over his apostasy and forced to acknowledge the hopelessness of his secular ambitions, Donne came to feel that his own suffering entitled him to such a new beginning" (p. 174).

Thus the "Let, then" frame that opens the poem sees its corollary "If, then" construction at the end; only, this time, the frame highlights the speaker's assertion of power, "If . . . *you cede some control*," he implies, "*then* . . . I'll turn my face."

The hypothetical nature of the frame that ends the poem contributes to its lack of closure. Thus, the speaker's frustration over his inability to repay "that sacrifice, which ransom'd us" lingers, like the endless day that he bemoans. Critical readings of the poem's ending tend to argue for a narrative trajectory and resolution. Malpezzi, for example, writes,

> Having dramatically learned the accessibility of sacred time through his meditation as he sees with his mind's eye that 'spectacle of too much weight,' he is made one with the crucified Christ. He now travels the *via purgative*, ready to accept the afflictions God gives him to help rein in the unruly beast as he rides to salvation.[33]

Halewood believes the outcome to be even more resolved, arguing,

> in the concluding lines of the poem, God enters to be spoken to, an event rhetorically signaled by a rush of vocatives that puts an end to question and debate, and closure for the work as a whole is effected by the 'ordinary miracle' of God's rectifying presence. As in *Job*, there is nothing more to say.[34]

The speaker may have no more to say, but he remains far from experiencing narrative or psychological closure. This lack of closure may indeed be seen as the speaker's attempt—to borrow Frontain's reading of Donne's anxiety about the uncertainty of grace—to "provoke God into either providing or finally denying the prevenient grace necessary for the speaker to feel justified in his election."[35] Yet the prominence of the speaker in the poem's ending rhyme, "thy grace" (41) with "my face" (42), suggests again his desire for power: to be not just seen and known but also to be the poem's narrative endpoint, most "present unto" the reader's "memory." Closure for the speaker in "Goodfriday"

[33] Malpezzi, p. 29.
[34] Halewood, p. 228.
[35] Frontain, p. 96.

is confounding because he lacks the power to forge a relationship with Christ that would be commensurate with Christ's sacrifice; "face" simply cannot compete with "grace." Thus his identity—linked closely to his agency—remains unsettled, as does his debt.

The agitation Donne's speaker demonstrates in failing to achieve assurance of self, however, bespeaks a more fundamental lack of confidence in the faith that, according to reformed theology, will save him. To remedy this lack of assurance, Donne turns to writing poetry, substituting work for faith. Because his intended audience includes patrons and a small coterie of peers, and because the speaker forms the central subject of his works, those works may be seen as a more private rehearsal of identity, rather than as a didactic exercise like Crashaw's and many of his contemporaries. Faced with the enormity of the Passion, his speakers seek power by toying with its surrender, and Donne continues to address a God who, unlike Herbert's God, never responds. In "Goodfriday," the speaker does not achieve a resolution because his lack of agency equates to his inability to define his identity in relation to God and Christ. Reading the poem in this way, rather than strictly as a conversion narrative or other theological struggle, highlights Donne's personal imperative to self-define before he may understand mortal salvation as a cause for brave gratitude instead of weighty obligation.

Romans 6:23 addresses this paradoxical nature of the crucifixion: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." No gift is free, however, and post-Reformation religious poets grapple with the complicated lack of reciprocity that salvation necessitates. After intense interior searching, Herbert's responses ultimately turn outward, back to Christ, as in "Ungratefulnesse" when he exclaims, "Lord, with what bountie and rare clemencie / Hast thou redeem'd us from the grave!" (1-2). Donne instead turns inward as his crucifixion poems rehearse a search for self-definition: "Who can deny me power, and liberty / To stretch mine arms, and mine own cross be?" (17-18) asks the speaker of "The Crosse," who later affirms, "For when that Crosse ungrudged, unto you sticks, / Then are you to yourself, a crucifix" (31-32). Donne's Passion poetry confronts the obligation that Christ's sacrifice creates in those he saved. For the speaker in "Goodfriday," the gift of salvation cannot

become a "Crosse ungrudged," and he bears his deeply complex debt of gratitude, powerless to do otherwise.

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