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ECSTATIC DONNE: CONSCIENCE, SIN, AND SURPRISE IN THE *SERMONS* AND THE MITCHAM LETTERS

Gary Kuchar

Be you and I behind an arras then. Mark the encounter.
—Polonius, *Hamlet*

When John Donne describes the effects of a well-delivered sermon in a 1620 address at Lincoln's Inn, he exploits the way in which conscience is generally thought, in Reformation theology, to be an agency rather than an act. The rhetorical power of his description of a good sermon relies, that is, on the Protestant view that conscience is a voice of judgment that speaks to us, rather than a rational process that is conducted by us—as in most forms of scholastic thought.¹ According to Donne, “It is not the depth, nor the wit, nor the eloquence of the Preacher that pierces us, but his nearnesse; that hee speaks to my conscience, as though he had been behinde the hangings when I sinned, and as though he had read the book of the day of Judgement already” (*Sermons*, 3.5.142).² The rhetorical force and spiritual meaningfulness of Donne's nearness effect both rest on the Protestant view that conscience is as an agency of judgment within the soul that produces knowledge of one's actions, rather than being a name for such knowledge itself. Exploiting this Reformed view of conscience as a distinct power (*virtus*) of the soul, Donne says, in effect, that the preacher should speak in a voice that is intimate enough with me to know my most disavowed secrets, but other enough from me to shock me by revealing them: the preacher, that is, should pierce my conscience by speaking as though he were my conscience. For Donne, the power of fascination a preacher possesses is directly proportional to his ability to get auditors to feel as well as understand the shock of surprise attendant upon an encounter with one's conscience as God's witness within the soul.

By identifying how Donne shows rather than merely tells us about the nearness effect in his sermons and letters, we will see how he conveys conscience as an ecstatic phenomenon that is crucial to both Jacobean pulpit oratory and the early modern experience of Protestant faith more generally. In this context, *ecstatic* should not be understood as implying anything mystical in the sense we use the term in relation to contemplative or non-conformist traditions; rather, it refers to the way that conscience can feel other to me in the sense that it can speak to me even if I don't want it to, even if its speaking is not willed by me.³ In the Reformation context of sin and conscience informing Donne's sermons, then, *ecstatic experiences* refer to phenomena that happen to me but feel as though they are somehow not proper to me as such. Because the ecstatic experience of hearing one's conscience against one's own intention is crucial to how Donne understands the role of a preacher and the experience of faith per se, it informs both the rhetorical structure and thematic itinerary of many individual sermons, as well as some of Donne's most compelling private letters.

The Sermons

The scenario of the lurking preacher from the 1620 Lincoln's Inn address is a case in point. Donne's description of how a good sermon should affect us is an unusually evocative articulation of the general idea that preachers should "bind," "touch," "pierce," or "move" the conscience.⁴ To express the sensation of having one's conscience bound, Donne presents the preacher's gaze both spatially, through the image of the witness behind the hangings, and temporally, through the perception that the preacher is privy to the Book of Judgment. By doing so, Donne expresses his hope that auditors will experience his voice according to three temporalities: one emanating from the disavowed moment of transgression in the past; one experienced in the shocking immediacy of the present—in the time of the sermon itself; and one looking back from the day of judgment in the eschatological future. In this way, the voice of the preacher is designed to produce the sort of guilt Martin Luther describes, in Michael Baylor's words, as "a claustrophobic kind of 'narrowness' that produces an urgent desire to escape."⁵

Yet, even as we are circumscribed temporally by the preacher's voice, we are also bound spatially through the image of the preacher hiding behind the arras: he sees us *now* as he saw us *then* and as we *shall* be seen. Through these images of circumscription, Donne conveys what it feels like to be pierced by conscience. He expresses what it is like to feel oneself being seen by the strange nearness of a personally omnivoyant conscience.

According to Donne's description, we should feel the preacher gazing at us in the private space of sin, just as our conscience gazes at us within the innermost recesses of our soul. This parallel between preacher and conscience rests, in part, on Romans 2:15–16, which asserts that the conscience gives the appearance of having access to the Book of Judgment. By granting this eschatological insight to the preacher, Donne speaks to our conscience by speaking as though he were our conscience.⁶

In his 1596 work *Discourse of Conscience*, William Perkins theorizes the ecstatic nature of conscience that Donne's scenario of the lurking preacher dramatizes. Drawing extensively on Calvin's analysis of conscience in the *Institutes*,⁷ Perkins contends that

conscience is of a divine nature, and is a thing placed of God in the midst betweene him and man, as an arbitratour to give sentence & to pronounce either with man or against man unto God. For otherwhiles, it consents and speakes with God against the man in whom it is placed: otherwhiles againe it consents with him and speakes for him before the mind, and knowes what the mind thinks, so as if a man would goe about to hide his sinfull thoughts from God, his conscience as it were Lord [*sic*].

Like Perkins's conscience, Donne's lurking preacher "knows what the mind thinks." Donne's scenario of the preacher and auditor thus dramatizes how the mind and conscience constitute, as Perkins proceeds to explain in light of Calvin's analysis, two related but discrete entities:

[H]ence comes one reason of the name of conscience. *Scire*, to know, is of one man alone by himself: and *conscire* is, when two at the least knowe some one secret thing; either of them knowing it together with the other. Therefore the name . . . *conscientia*, Conscience, is that thing that combines two together, and makes them partners in the knowledge of one and the same secret.⁸

For Perkins, the conscience is not part of man *qua* man. Rather, it is a faculty within us, which is not, strictly speaking, part of us, that knows, keeps, and judges our secrets.

By adopting this view, Perkins follows Calvin in asserting that, in Randall Zachman's formulation, "The knowing subject of *scientia* is the human being [while] the knowing subject of *conscientia* is God the judge."⁹

Perkins thus reiterates Calvin's view of conscience over and against scholastic positions on the topic, as he indicates in the following:

Agaïne I say that conscience . . . is not a bare knowledge or judgement of the understanding (as men comonly write) but a naturall power, facultie, or created qualitie from whence knowledge and judgement proceede as effects. This the Scriptures confirme, in that they ascribe sundrie workes and actions to conscience, as accusing, excusing, comforting, terrifying: which actions could not thence proceede, if conscience were no more but an action or acte of the minde. (5)

Although Perkins is less rigorous than Calvin in separating the conscience from the faculty of understanding, he shares Calvin's view, *pace* certain strains of scholasticism, that conscience is entirely distinct from the will (*voluntas*).¹⁰ This Reformed view results in formulations such as that by Jeremiah Dyke, who describes conscience "as Gods spy, and man's superior and overseer."¹¹ Because knowledge produced by the conscience is separate from the will, such knowledge cannot be wholly suppressed. As a result of being subject to the knowledge of the conscience, the Christian soul, according to Calvin, is repeatedly placed before the judgment of God, even when the will would desire otherwise.¹² This aspect of conscience is crucial to Donne's representation of the life of faith in the sermons. Indeed, although Donne arguably attributes greater authority to reason in the human psyche than does either Perkins or Calvin, he shares their Protestant view that the conscience is a divine witness within and of the soul.¹³ Thus, by speaking to our conscience as though he were spying on us while we sinned, Donne's ideal preacher speaks as though he were our Pauline-Reformed conscience.

Insofar as this Reformed notion of conscience emphasizes its daimonic otherness to us as volitional agents, it has much greater potential to be experienced as alarmingly alien than medieval versions of conscience, especially those that place conscience within the faculty of the will.¹⁴ Because Aquinas and other writers in both the *Via Antiqua* and the *Via Moderna* view conscience as an act of mind rather than an agency of judgment, they do not generally represent conscience as alien in the sense Luther, Calvin, and their followers tend to.¹⁵ The perturbing qualities inherent in Reformed notions of conscience are powerfully evinced when Perkins addresses the question of "[h]ow long conscience beares witnes" of oneself:

[I]t doth it continually; not for a minute, or a day, or a month, or a yeare, but for ever; when a man dies, conscience

dieth not: when the body is rotten in the grave, conscience liveth & is safe & sound: and when we shall rise againe, conscience shall come with us to the barre of Goddes judgement, either to accuse or excuse us before God, Rom. 2.15.16. *Their conscience bearing witness at the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.* (8)

The idea that there is an immanent and immortal power witnessing and testifying to one's actions is cause, Perkins argues, for at least five passions: shame, sorrow, feare, desperation, and perturbation (39). Donne seeks to provoke such perturbations of conscience when he asserts that the preacher's voice has access to your sins in a way that is analogous to God's witness in the soul. Indeed, the dramatic force of Donne's sermons often rests on his ability to both enact and inspire the kind of shock associated with the daimonic nearness of a conscience that is within us but is other to us as willful beings.

The specific modality of surprise attendant upon the nearness effect is best captured by the verb "deprehend," which Donne uses in several places to express the process of discovering something previously unknown or forgotten. A much richer word than "surprise," *deprehend* can mean "to seize, capture, arrest or apprehend" (*Oxford English Dictionary [OED]*, 1); "to catch or detect (a person) in the commission of some evil or secret deed; to take by surprise" (*OED*, 2); "to convict or prove guilty" (*OED*, 2b); or "to detect or discover (anything concealed or liable to escape notice)" (*OED*, 3).¹⁶ Donne uses this term in a sermon that seems directed at an auditor who "longeth for the end of the Sermon, or the end of that point in the Sermon, which is a thorne to his conscience" in order to express the experience of spiritual awakening (4.8.212). Even a congregant who may appear to be listening, or a soul who may appear to be in search of God's light, sometimes is not and so "often may you surprise and deprehend a man, whom you thinke directly to look upon such an object, yet if you aske him the quality or colour of it, he will tell you, he saw it not?" (4.8.212). As this passage suggests, Donne generally uses *deprehend* to express distinctly spiritual forms of apprehension. As a result, he employs the term as a way of articulating acts of knowing that involve an element of surprise or, more interestingly, those that do not happen consciously. In a sermon on Romans 13:7, for example, Donne discusses the importance of remaining steadfast in matters of conscience, teaching that "God heares the very first motions of a mans heart, which, that man, till he proceed to a farther consideration, doth not heare, not feele, not deprehend in himselfe" (4.12.310). Most importantly, then, *deprehension* entails a mode of

knowing-with, of rediscovering oneself by means of an encounter with another person, text, or, as in the case of the last quotation, the motions of one's heart as something that is not under the control of one's will and understanding and that is thus, from a phenomenological standpoint, other to oneself.

The shock attendant upon the experience of being deprehended is expressed in a sermon on Psalm 6.1, in which Donne explores some of the ways God uses the interrogative mode. Donne describes the process of being "deprehended" when he explains how God's questions work by confounding us, eliciting surprise, wonder, and renewed self-analysis: "If God surprize a Conscience with a sudden question, if God deprehend a man in the Act of his sin, and while he accomplishes and consummates that sin, say to his soul, Why dost thou this, upon which mine anger hangs? there God speaks to that sinner, but he confounds him with the question" (5.16.334). A sermon is successful when auditors are confounded by a preacher's words in the same way they are confounded by the voice of their own conscience. In the act of being deprehended, one is led to know-with one's conscience, which, in Perkins' formulations, is like a "Notarie, or a Register that hath alwaies the penne in his hand, to note & record whatsoever is said or done" (8).

From a phenomenological standpoint, the experience of being deprehended by one's conscience is uncanny in the sense David Krell defines the term. In an essay that draws together Heidegger's and Freud's theorizing on the topic, Krell defines the *uncanny* as a species of terror that arises in relation to "something long familiar, something experienced and known of old in a nonintellectual way, something both lost and found in the mists of time."¹⁷ For Krell, the uncanny is best understood structurally, as an encounter with something that had been kept secret but reemerges unexpectedly. The process of this return, moreover, induces a crisis of propriety; it generates a newfound sense that the relation between what is me and what is not-me is neither simple nor under my control.¹⁸

If Perkins expresses the uncanny qualities of conscience by figuring it variously as a notary, a witness, and a judge, Donne figures such qualities by describing conscience as oracular. In a sermon on Genesis 32:10, Donne asserts, *pace* Plutarch, that the classical oracles did not cease but were internalized into Christian souls:

God is not departed from thee; thou knowest by thy self, it is a vain complaint that *Plutarch* makes, *defectu oraculorum*, that oracles are ceased; there is no defect of oracles in thine own bosome . . . Here is no *defectus Oraculorum* no ceasing

of Oracles . . . Every mans Diligence, and discretion is a God to himselfe . . . bring thine Actions . . . to the debatement of thy conscience rectified, and [thou] still shalt hear, *Jubentem Dominum* or *Dominum Revocantem*, God will bid thee stop, or God will bid Thee go forwards in that way. (1.7.282)

Christians have access to the divine, Donne claims, simply by listening to the oracular voice of their own guilt. The externality of classical oracles is thus internalized through the strangely interior-exterior modality of the Protestant conscience as an inward voice that is not directly one's own. So when Donne says that the preacher's voice should speak to our conscience as though he were present at the moment we sinned, he is saying, in effect, that it should pierce our soul with the force of an oracle who knows our secrets with greater clarity than we have wanted to know them ourselves. By figuring the preacher as one who knows and judges our secrets, Donne positions himself in the role of conscience as such. This externalization of conscience is similar to how conscience is actually experienced by the Christian soul.

The rhetorical power of Donne's externalization of conscience in the 1620 Lincoln's Inn sermon rests, in part, on its notably theatrical character. The image of the preacher behind the hangings at the primal scene of sin is consistent with accounts of the dramatic nature of Donne's sermons, as well as the fact that playgoers in the period were almost inevitably sermon-goers, especially those at Lincoln's Inn.¹⁹ Indeed, Donne's description of sacred rhetoric in this sermon seems to rely on his audience's awareness of early modern staging practices, something Donne would certainly have known from his relatively well-documented love of the early modern theater and from his time as Master of the Revels at the Inns of Court. In particular, his description of the preacher behind the hangings recalls how many early modern plays depict a sin being either witnessed or committed by someone hiding behind the curtains that were normally suspended in front of the tiring-house wall. Numerous early modern plays take advantage of this feature of the early modern stage, including Jonson's *Volpone* (1606) (which Donne praised in verse form) and the closet scene in *Hamlet* (1601).²⁰

While many plays stage sins either behind or before the arras, others make reference to this theatrical iconography in ways similar to Donne. For example, the lead character, Tancred, in the Inns of Court play, *The Tragedie of Tancred and Gismund* (1591), describes how he witnessed his daughter having sex outside of marriage while he hid within the curtains. Rising from prayer, Tancred relates how his "fond delight" for his daughter Gismund resulted in him witnessing her in bed with her lover.²¹

The shock that Tancred describes (and that the audience presumably shares to some degree) constitutes the kind of context informing how Donne sought to surprise through the nearness effect.

Such conscience effects inevitably bring to mind Hamlet's assertion "that guilty creatures sitting at a play / Have by the very cunning of the scene / Been struck so to the soul that presently / They have proclaimed their malefactions."²² Like Hamlet's description of the effects of drama, Donne's scenario of the eavesdropping preacher recalls the existence of the character of Conscience that appears in Tudor interludes and morality plays. In plays such as *The World and the Child* (1522), Conscience plays opposite the Vice in leading heroes toward virtue rather than sin. Donne conceives of the preacher's role in terms evocative of Conscience's role in Tudor morality plays.²³ In this way, Donne's account of a good sermon is further proof of Brian Crockett's thesis that the stated goals of pulpit orators and early modern players were often difficult to distinguish. As Crockett observes, Perkins described preaching as an attempt "[t]o bind the conscience . . . either to accuse us or to excuse us of sin before God," just as the playwright and theatrical apologist Thomas Heywood argued "A play's a true transparent crystal mirror, / To shew good minds their mirth, the bad their terror."²⁴ Donne's description of how auditors should experience a sermon draws its force from the way stage and sermon cross-pollinated each other in the period.

If Donne's description of the nearness effect appears perturbing when cited in isolation from its immediate context in the 1620 sermon, it is even more so when read in relation to the sermon as a whole. The passage occurs in a sermon on Genesis 18:25, specifically Abraham's encounter with what Donne, following patristic and Reformation exegeses, interprets as three angels.²⁵ Donne focuses particular attention on the idea that Abraham was intrigued by one of the three angels because one angel appeared strangely, but inexpressibly, familiar to him. Donne claims that there was "[s]omething *Abraham* saw in this Angel above the rest, which drew him, which *Moses* does not expresse" (3.5.142). Abraham's mysterious reaction to the angel serves as an analogy for the auditor's response to the strangely proximal quality of an effective preacher's voice. Emphasizing the irreducible singularity of each man's conscience, Donne informs his auditors that often there is "[s]omething a man finds in one Preacher above another, which he cannot expresse" (3.5.142). Like the nearness of preacher and auditor, Abraham's sense of familiarity with the angel involves something so unique, something so individual, that it appears in the text only as a silence. This silence figures the mysteriousness of nearness as a phenomenon that is inherent to the sermon as a genre and to the experience of conscience that the genre seeks to effect.

The analogy between the Genesis text and Donne's idea of a well-executed sermon works by having his auditors project themselves into the pregnant silence Donne locates in Abraham's encounter with the angels. The silence generated by Donne's interpretation of the Genesis text is meant to be experienced rather than simply noted by an auditor; it should be felt not as an empty sign, a meaningless pause, but as a signifier of my private experience of guilt before my own conscience. Donne is not just speaking of Abraham's recognition, he is trying to make his auditors experience such a recognition for themselves. He is creating the space for a kind of penitential transference—the space in and through which an audience member might relive previously forgotten events in the present. It is in such a space that one can reencounter oneself in the light of the conscience and thus recognize the terrifying nearness of the preacher as an other who is both intimate and alien. In this respect, Donne uses Abraham's encounter with some familiar, yet difficult to articulate, aspect of the angel as an allegory of the auditor's relation to a preacher, who is presumed to know the sins one has committed. Through this process, Donne seeks to convert his auditors from what, in a different sermon on the penitential psalms, he defines as the deceitful silence of sin to the devout silence of obedience to God or *silentium subjectionis*.²⁶

What makes the scene of Abraham's silence uncanny is its reflexive qualities: Donne's performance might affect us in the exact way as the allegory of sermonic experience in the sermon itself. This kind of rhetorical structure is analogous to a scenario in which a viewer is looking at a representation—say, a picture or a play—only to realize that he himself is *in the representation*. The nearness effect Donne seeks to generate unsettles the distinction between the familiar and the strange, inside and outside, self and other. The nearness effect thus names the oratorical desire to have auditors realize a Protestant version of the *de te fabula* principle—to understand that the story is about me in my private experience of guilt.

To accomplish such a goal, the preacher must take into account not only the irreducible singularity of each Christian's conscience but also the universality of sin as a shared dimension of human life. In a related sermon, Donne turns to the psalmist David in order to express the preacher's desire to have everyone in the audience identify themselves as sinners:

His example is so comprehensive, so generall, that as a well made, and well placed Picture in a Gallery looks upon all that stand in severall places of the Gallery, in severall lines, in severall angles, so doth *Davids* history concerne and embrace all. (5.15.299)

The nearness effect consists of drawing auditors into such a frame by having them recognize themselves as objects of its gaze. Thus, where Abraham's experience expresses the irreducible singularity of an auditor's experience of sin, figured as a pregnant silence into which a listener projects his past transgressions, David's example expresses the universality of sin as a common human inheritance.

Donne expresses David's general relevance as a sinner by attributing to the portrait of his sins the omnivoyance that Nicholas of Cusa gives to God when the German theologian describes the divine gaze in the same way Donne describes David's. Just as Cusa's God sees everything at once, so David's sins encompass all possible acts of transgression.²⁷ Thus, Donne's use of these two figures, Abraham and David, indicates the rhetorical balancing act a preacher must accomplish to generate a nearness effect: a preacher must speak generally enough to encompass all possible sins but singularly enough to address an auditor's private transgression.

The figure of David provides Donne with his favorite vehicle for expressing the experience of conscience as an ecstatic phenomenon. In a sermon on Psalm 32.3–4, for example, Donne expresses how David's attempt to conceal his adultery from others and from himself resulted in an involuntary eruption of guilt. Donne expresses David's experience of conscience through the rhetoric of *copia*, an accumulation of greater and greater effects built up over time. The pattern of *amplificatio* re-creates the experience of a failed effort to contain an irrepressible sense of guilt and the inadvertent consequences resulting from its failed denial. Despite his best efforts, David cannot suppress his sins thoroughly enough to remain beyond the purview of his conscience as internal witness:

He confesses his silence to have been *Ex doloso spiritu*, Out of a spirit, in which was deceit; And *David* did not hope, directly, and determinately to deceive God; But by endeavouring to hide his sin from other men, and from his owne conscience, he buried it deeper and deeper, but still under more and more sins. He silences his Adultery, but he smothers it, he buries it under a turfe of hypocrisie, of dissimulation . . . He silences this hypocrisie; but that must have a larger turfe to cover it; he buries it under the whole body of *Vriah*, treacherously murdered; He silences that murder, but no turfe was large enough to cover that, but the defeat of the whole army, and after all, the blaspheming of the name, and power of the Lord of Hosts, in the ruine of the army. That sin, which, if he would have carried it

upward towards God, in Confession, would have vanished away, and evaporated, by silencing, by suppressing, by burying multiplied, as Corne buried in the earth, multiplies into many Eares. And, though he might (perchance for his farther punishment) overcome the remembrance of the first sin, he might have forgot the Adultery, and feele no paine of that, yet still being put to a new, and new sin, still the last sin that he did to cover the rest, could not chuse but appeare to his conscience. (9.12.287–88)

Like Donne's preacher behind the hangings, David's conscience speaks truth to the soul despite all efforts of concealing the past. While David silences his hypocrisy, his sins "could not chuse but appeare to his conscience" erupting in a kind of anagnorisis where his deceitful soul is exposed and his transgressions recalled.

In the following sermon on Psalm 32.5, Donne expresses David's terror as a sinner by emphasizing the terrifying gap between his self-perception before and after experiencing the judgments of conscience. Once David is confronted by the demonic face of his own otherness in the form of sin, he returns to himself through the potentially salvific otherness of conscience. In this way, Donne shifts our perception from the daimonic quality of conscience and the demonic quality of sin, both of which entail an experience of becoming other to oneself. Donne enhances the sense of surprise attendant upon David's confrontation with his daimonic conscience by shifting in the middle of the passage from third-person to first-person pronouns. Though subtle, this grammatical shift is existentially and dramatically consequential, for it reminds us that just as the preacher is subject to the theme of sin that he is sermonizing—so too are we:

[H]ee sees his sinnes looke with other faces, and he heares his sins speak with other voyces, and hee findes them to call one another by other names: And when hee is thus come to that consideration, Lord! how have I mistaken my selfe, Am I, that thought my selfe, and passed with others, for a sociable, a pleasurable man, and good company; am I a leprous Adulterer . . . I mistooke my selfe all this while, so I may proceed to the *non operui*, to a perfit sifting of my conscience, in all corners. (9.13.300)

If the temporality of Donne's scene with the lurking preacher emphasizes the perturbation inspired by the knowledge that God forejudges our

sins by means of our conscience, the textual frame of this sermon emphasizes the comfort inspired by the knowledge that God forgives sins before they have actually been committed. This view of divine forgiveness as having always already happened in the mind of God is grounded, Donne argues, in the verbal tense of the word “forgavest” in line 5 of Psalm 32. Because the sermon is framed by the divine perspective of God’s mercy, David’s confession is figured as comforting rather than terrifying: “I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN UNTO THEE, AND MINE INIQUITY HAVE I NOT HID. I SAID, I *WILL* CONFESSE MY TRANSGRESSIONS UNTO THE LORD, AND THOU FORGAVEST THE INIQUITY OF MY SIN” (9.13.296, my emphasis). The retrospective temporality of forgiveness vis-à-vis confession helps express Donne’s thesis that we confess not to bring something to God’s attention, but to bring our soul in alignment with our conscience and thus with God. In this respect, the otherness of sin and the experience of self-alienation arising from such otherness are overcome in the sermon through the ecstasis of conscience, which operates as a divine oracle. In other words, while sin others oneself to oneself in a demonic way, a good conscience others oneself to oneself in a salvific way. In this latter modality of ecstasis, the uncanny encounter with conscience brings to light the self hidden within and by sin. Donne thus concludes this sequence by confessing that he will initiate a perfect “sifting of my conscience, in all corners,” and like David “rip up that, and enter into the privatest, and most remote corners thereof” (9.13.300–301). The final result of this process is an avowal of sin, where Donne announces that “*I acknowledged my sin, and I hid none, disguised none*” (9.13.300). In the final analysis, such confession is the ultimate purpose of inspiring the nearness effect.

Whereas Donne dramatizes David’s crisis of conscience in the sermons on Psalm 32, he offers a more fully theorized account of the role conscience plays in self-examination in a sermon on Mark 16:16. If Perkins describes the conscience as a notary who records all of our actions despite our desire to forget them, Donne figures the heart as a book in which all of our experiences are inscribed, despite our intention to overlook them. The role of the conscience is to recover our guilt and thereby render the heart legible again:

The heart is a booke, legible enough, and intelligible in it selfe; but we have so interlined that booke with impertinent knowledge, and so clasped up that booke, for feare of reading our owne history, our owne sins, as that we are greatest strangers, and the least conversant with the examination of our owne hearts. (5.13.248)

For Donne, the experience of feeling other to oneself is part of an ameliorative but egotistically unsettling process of conversion—a dialectic, as he writes in the *Devotions*, between humiliation and restoration, terror and comfort.²⁸ In such an experience, it is God's overpresence in the soul, his nearness in the form of conscience, rather than his anxiety-inducing absence, that is perturbing. Donne's account of the lived experience of conscience as involving a dimension of the uncanny reveals both the genius and the limitations of Freud's thesis in "The Future of an Illusion" that religious thought is designed to make us "feel at home in the uncanny." For Freud, religious belief tames the uncanniness of life, giving us a "psychical means" of coping with the "senseless anxiety" of existence as such.²⁹ What Donne helps us to grasp is that Pauline Christianity marshals a certain form of the uncanny—using it as part of the process of destroying and re-creating individuals as subjects of Christ. To understand the literary power of Donne's representation of conscience is to recognize how this element of the uncanny is put to work.³⁰

As we have seen, one of the ways Donne draws on the uncanny is by constructing rhetorical and dramatic scenarios in which he functions as both auditor and preacher, in which he is as much within the frame of God's judgment as we, his audience, are. This practice of including himself as both auditor and preacher is evinced in the 1620 sermon on Genesis 18, when Donne figures himself as the sinner whose transgression is being witnessed by the lurking preacher: "It is not the depth, nor the wit, nor the eloquence of the Preacher that pierces us, but his nearnesse; that hee speaks to my conscience, as though he had been behinde the hangings when I sinned, and as though he had read the book of the day of Judgement already" (*Sermons*, 3.5.142). Donne's sermons thus not only enact but also thematize this reflexive and potentially perturbing dimension of conscience. Most interestingly, they do so without diminishing their capacity to capture our conscience: just as the metadramatic quality of a Shakespeare play can enhance rather than deflate our sense of its magic, so too can the reflexive dimensions of a Donne sermon still surprise and catch us up in it.

The Mitcham Letters

Donne's penchant for expressing the ecstatic dimensions of conscience often involves a pattern of rhetorical reflexivity, a kind of stylistic signature in which he moves from the outside to the inside, from the selfsame to the self-as-other. To use Donne's own terms, the nearness effect is often

achieved through a rhetorical shift from the “foreign” to the “home-born,” from the external to the intestine (*First Anniversary*, 80, 84).³¹ John E. Parish notices this basic structure at work in “Batter My Heart,” asserting that “as a whole, the poem is unified by a shifting viewpoint which produces the effect of God’s boring from the outside into the very center of the human heart.”³² *An Anatomy of the World* operates according to a similar logic as readers are told at the outset that the experience of interpreting the poem will reveal one of two things: either they each have a soul who is able to “see, and Judge, and follow worthiness” or they each “[m]ay lodge an In-mate soule, but tis not his” (1–6). This commonly recurring pattern, and some of the key images often associated with it, are given a stunning articulation in a letter written to Donne’s close friend Sir Henry Goodyer in 1608.³³ In this letter, as in the Lincoln’s Inn sermon, the addressee finds himself represented by and inserted into the text in unexpected, even shocking, ways.

Like many of the letters written during the Mitcham years (1607–10), this epistle addresses Donne’s melancholy, particularly as it arises from his anxiety over the limitations of human reason in the confrontation with sin. What distinguishes the letter from others of the same period is its rigorous, if morbidly ironic, interrogation of the difficult nature of arriving at self-understanding through the diagnosis of mental disease. In the process of this letter’s complex rhetorical performance, Donne presents a vision of human knowledge in which the human subject is not merely prone to disease but is constitutively diseased, a subject not simply threatened by external pressures but a subject vexed by internal, structurally determined limitations. In short, Donne’s letter expresses the epistemological implications of Reformation views of the will as profoundly limited in scope. More precisely, Donne expresses what it feels like to live out the view that, as Luther puts it, “flesh . . . means everything that is born from the flesh, i.e., the entire self, body, and soul, including our reason and all our senses.”³⁴

Following on this view of the flesh as circumscribing both body and soul, Luther severely criticized the medieval habit of thinking analogically about the relations between humans and God. For Luther, the habits of mind which lead one to believe that divine justice can be understood by reference to human ideas of justice, or that one can understand the invisible things of God by means of empirically perceptible phenomena, are delusional—symptoms of what he calls the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*). Real faith, for Luther, opposes itself to analogical habits of thought that operate according to principles of similitude. A wise soul does not look for analogies between human perception and divine reality, as Augustine

often did. On the contrary, the Reformed Christian seeks to understand God through the paradoxes of the cross or (*theologia crucis*)—the idea that God conceals his omnipotence in weakness, his greatness in suffering.³⁵ In the context of human self-understanding, this Reformation critique of the theological use of analogy can result in a “hermeneutical circle” in which one cannot know whether one is in a state of sinfulness or grace, spiritual illness or health. As Thomas McDonough remarks, for Luther the human will is “curved in on itself, *incurvatus in se*,” constitutively bent toward sinfulness and creatureliness.³⁶ If the only way out of such narcissistic incurving is faith, then how does one apply one’s reason to ensure the status of the soul? How does one know one is spiritually healthy rather than spiritually ill? Such is Donne’s problem in several of the Mitcham letters, especially the one dated March 1608.

Donne’s letters during the Mitcham years are characterized by a pronounced sensitivity to the possibility that the will is *incurvatus in se*, that the will may be, as Luther and Calvin argue, bound within a hermeneutical circle precluding any transparent or even analogical understanding of how the self is an *imago Dei*. This anxiety over Reformation views of the will is expressed in the 1608 letter to Goodyer through a rhetorical pattern that emphasizes the helplessness of the sinner caught in a state of sin.³⁷ The letter begins with an inquiry into Goodyer’s state of being before quickly turning into a confession: “I hope you are now welcome to London, and well, and well comforted in your father’s health and love, and well contended that we ask you how you do and tell you how we are, which yet I cannot of myself.”³⁸ Donne thus presents his letter as having been occasioned by a failed meditation on the Delphic dictum *nosce teipsum*. The letter proceeds not by correcting but by further dramatizing this failure.

Its analysis of the impossible art of self-understanding starts with an outline of a pre-Reformation trichotomic view of humans as divided between the soul, body, and mind:

If I knew that I were ill, I were well, for we consist of three parts, a soul, and body and mind, which I call those thoughts and affections and passions which neither soul nor body hath alone but have been begotten by their communication, as music results out of our breath and a cornet. (30)

Assuming a homeopathic theory of disease in which elements of the affliction can be employed to cure the affliction itself, Donne asserts that “of all these the diseases are cures, if they be known” (30–31). Donne thus claims

with apparent confidence that our knowledge of the body and the soul may be limited, but, on the whole, there is no need to be overly skeptical: in the case of the soul, disease is a function of sin, and so the “physic” comes in the form of confession and the self-knowledge derived in the process; and, in the case of the body, the rules of physic “are certain . . . if the matter be rightly applied to the rule” (31). The real problems come, Donne warns, with the mind:

But of the diseases of the mind there is no criterion, no canon, no rule. For our own taste and apprehension and interpretation should be the judge, and that is the disease itself. (31)

Although Donne began his analysis by addressing the problem of how to diagnose particular diseases, he has been led to a diagnosis of something far more fundamental; he has been led to a structural limitation within the very process of knowing itself. The problem with diagnosing diseases of the mind, Donne says, is that we have to use the mind’s powers to do it. The homeopathic paradox of curing disease with disease takes a perverse turn here as the mind’s own methods become the very problem they are supposed to resolve.

By exposing the reflexive deadlocks inherent to self-understanding, Donne implicitly undermines the coherence of his original distinction between the diagnosable diseases of the soul and the nondiagnosable diseases of the mind. Because “thoughts and affections and passions” arise from the communication between soul, body, and mind all three are necessarily involved in the process of distinguishing amongst themselves. Expressing the reflexive circumvolutions of the tripartite soul, Donne’s letter implies that while the three parts of the person may be distinguishable in trichotomic theory, they remain diffusely interwoven in epistemological practice. The letter thus suggests that the spiritual dimensions of the soul cannot stand outside of the fleshly dimensions of the mind long enough or thoroughly enough to properly see the difference between the two. By rendering illegible the differences between man as flesh and man as spirit, Donne is enacting the implications of Luther’s view that the whole person (*totus homo*), rather than merely the *psyche* and *body*, stands under the sign of *caro*, of the creatureliness of the flesh.

While Donne’s letter opens by enacting the limitations of human reason at the level of theory, it deepens its skeptical motions through a series of theologically loaded examples of cognitive corruption, each depicting some form of interpretive confusion. In one key example, Donne bemoans

how a single phenomenon can inspire the best intellects to radically opposed interpretations:

Augustine thought devout Antony to be . . . full of the Holy Ghost because, not being able to read, he could say the whole Bible and interpret it, and Thyreus the Jesuit, for the same reason, doth think all the Anabaptists to be possessed. And as often out of contrary things men draw one conclusion. (31)

Donne follows this by asserting that the only thing worse than disagreement among great men over theological matters is disagreement within the self: “[T]he mind, which is our natural guide here, chooses to every man a several way. Scarce any man likes what another doth, nor, advisedly, that which himself” (31). Here *writ small* is the rhetorical motion of the letter *writ large*: Donne begins by addressing an apparently external problem only to find that the problem is the psyche itself, its lack of the necessary resources for obtaining a clear method of self-analysis.

By this point in the letter, Donne has arrived at the terrifying recognition that if thoughts are a function of soul, body, and mind, then the diagnostic procedures for all three elements of the person are subject to the misprisions he originally located solely in the mind. Thus, the distinctions organizing Donne’s line of thought become increasingly diffuse the further the analysis proceeds. In the face of such confusion, he cannot come to properly know himself: “I still vex myself with this because, if I know it not, nobody can know it” (31). *Goodyer* is thus witness to a rhetorical performance in which neither homeopathic nor heteropathic methods of physic can remedy human pathologies because human pathologies are a matter of inward corruption rather than an outward matter of infection.

The rhetorical structure organizing this performance unfolds by placing increasing pressure on the tripartite theory of the self grounding Donne’s analysis. Such increasing pressure suggests that Donne is in the process of grappling with the implications of Luther’s attack on tripartite views of the soul, particularly Origen’s, which is the most influential. As Luther writes in his disputation with Erasmus, “I, too, am familiar with Origen’s fable about the threefold disposition of flesh, soul, and spirit, with soul standing in the middle and being capable of turning either way, toward the flesh or toward the spirit. But these are dreams of his own; he states but does not prove them.”³⁹ Donne signals the radically skeptical conclusion a reader must draw from his self-consciously erring speculations

on the limits of self-consciousness in the letter's final and most remarkable paragraph:

But, sir, I am beyond my purpose. I mean to write a letter, and I am fallen into a discourse, and I do not only take you from some business but I make you a new business by drawing you into these meditations, in which let my openness be an argument of such love as I would fain express in some worthier fashion. (31)

By exceeding his "purpose," Donne acknowledges that his line of thought has carried him beyond his "intention," "resolution," or discourse. And given the collapsing of distinctions at work in his effort to know himself, the conclusion implies that the process of exceeding one's purpose is a risk not limited to himself, but one inherent in the act of reasoning, indeed the act of "discourse" itself. Thus, when he says he has drawn Goodyer into these meditations, he seems to mean it quite literally. Just as the failure of diagnosing the mind necessarily leads to failures in diagnosing the soul and body, so Donne's failure to know himself is a result of limitations that extend to everyone else's capacity for self-analysis. By the end of the letter, then, an apparently external object, Donne's discourse, has been disclosed as uncannily interior: the letter not only discusses the mind's limitations, it exemplifies them. Thus, while his meditation began on solid trichotomic grounds, it ends in a state of Lutheran paralysis—a state in which both soul and mind are mired not just in moral corruption but in epistemological insufficiency. So much for wishing Goodyer well.

Read closely, the letter's sardonic "purpose" is a function of its reflexive structure, in the way Donne self-consciously gets caught up in self-consciousness. In this respect, the letter is more expressive than thematic, more performative than constative. Indeed, the letter performs the reflexive paradox that one of Donne's contemporary readers, his fellow churchman Godfrey Goodman, thematizes several years later in his treatise on original sin. In a remarkable passage in the treatise, Goodman declares "I forget my selfe, I forget my selfe, for, speaking of mans corruption, I am so far entangled, that I cannot easily release my selfe; being corrupted as wel as others, me thinkes whatsoever I see, whatsoever I heare, all things seeme to sound corruption."⁴⁰ By performing such delimitations, Donne's letter presumes that its reader is both the interpreter and the object being interpreted, just as it generates the effect that its own author is subject to the forces he himself has put into play: "I am fallen into a discourse," indeed. Thus, just as Donne's collapsing of preacher and auditor in the 1620

sermon on Genesis 18 produces the very nearness effect he is describing, so the letter of 1608 produces a similarly surprising effect by drawing the reader into its self-consuming motions.

By unexpectedly finding both himself and his addressee *in the letter*, Donne offers something of a parody of the form of ecstasis he elsewhere associates with epistles more generally. In a letter dated October 1607, Donne describes personal correspondence as “a kind of extasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate it self to two bodies” (27). If this earlier letter theorizes a quasi-sacramental mingling of souls that is achieved through the spiritual power of material words—a theory John Carey argues is irreducible to classical and humanist thought on the topic—then the letter to Goodyer presents a more skeptical correspondence of souls.⁴¹ In the letter of 1608, the shock of ecstasis arises not through the transcendence of soul from body, but from an encounter with the radical delimitations of mortal existence. Indeed, the “openness of love” that Donne would “fain express in some more worthier fashion” (31) does not occasion the mystically ecstatic experience Donne sees as characteristic of good letters; rather it involves a more humbling, kenotic experience of realizing one’s mortal and epistemological limits.

The rhetorical force of the 1608 letter is thus similar to the force of Donne’s later sermons: its power of fascination derives from the letter’s capacity to express the feeling of being unable to control a phenomenon that happens within us. The letter voices the perturbing sensation of being overwhelmed by forces internal to us by tracing a reflexive movement from disease as an external threat to an internal condition. Through this pattern, Donne encourages Goodyer to experience the very delimitations being diagnosed by recognizing them as applying as much to himself as to the letter’s author. So if the letter is a testament to what Donne calls, in his theoretical account of letters, “friendships sacraments,” it is a sacrament only those souls predisposed to the stresses of skepticism will want to partake of.⁴²

Donne pursues a parallel itinerary in the subsequent letter to Goodyer, which also takes the form of a self-diagnosis. This letter begins as a description of Donne’s melancholy as a state of spiritual paralysis caused by external forces or “storms”:

[B]eing to pass more and more storms, I find that I have not only cast out all my ballast which nature and time gives (reason and discretion), and so am as empty and light as vanity can make me, but I have over-fraught myself with vice, and

so am riddingly subject to two contrary wracks, sinking and
oversetting. (32)

As the letter progresses, however, we learn that the disease corroding Donne's powers of discretion is not a "storm" battering him from the outside, but is an inward state that resists denomination. As such, his condition remains intransigently immune from diagnosis:

as the earth and water, one sad, the other fluid, make but one body, so to air and vanity there is but one *centrum morbi* [centre of the disease], and that which later physicians say of our bodies is fitter for our minds. For that which they call destruction, which is a corruption and want of those fundamental parts whereof we consist, is vice, and that *collectio stercorum* [dungheap], which is but the excrement of that corruption, is our vanity and indiscretion. Both these have but one root in me, and must be pulled out at once, or never. But I am so far from digging to it, that I know not where it is, for it is not in mine eyes only, but in every sense, nor in my concupiscence only, but in every power and affection. (32–33)

Like the experience of conscience in the sermons, the state of sin is characterized in the Mitcham letters as a state of being subject to a power that is profoundly intimate and yet disturbingly alien. Donne's religious imagination is characterized by its profound sensitivity to such phenomena. Consequently, many of his key rhetorical strategies express an ambivalence about the ecstatic features of Christian life, especially as they are complicated in the post-Reformation period through the delimitation of the will under the sign of the flesh. Thus, while accounts of Donne's representation of conscience in relation to casuistry help explain some of the thematic concerns of his religious writing, along with some of the rhetorical structures employed therein, such accounts do not adequately explain how Donne expresses conscience as a phenomenon that is characterized by the way it temporally, spatially, and cognitively circumscribes a person. In other words, accounts of Donne's representation of conscience that focus primarily on casuistical features do not explain how Donne expresses the ecstatic dimensions of conscience by breaking down distinctions between text and reader, author and auditor, and words and Word. As I have argued, such dissolutions of apparent oppositions often unfold through a pattern in which the speaker moves from focusing on external (or "foreign")

threats to internal (or “home-grown”) harms. It is through such patterns that Donne generates various forms of the nearness effect so characteristic of his religious writing as a whole. Thus, to experience Donne’s religious prose means historicizing not only its thematic messages but also its formal structures. Such structures, I have argued, both describe and evoke phenomenological dimensions of religious faith as lived within the context of early modern England.

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NOTES

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1. This distinction is implicit in Martin Luther’s definition of conscience from his 1521 work on *Monastic Vows*: “[T]he conscience is not the power of acting but the power of judging which judges about works . . . Its purpose is not to do, but to speak about what has been done and what should be done” (cited in Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 20–21).
2. All references to Donne’s sermons are cited parenthetically in text by volume, sermon, and page number and are from *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. and intro. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
3. To date, most studies of Donne’s representation of conscience have focused on the discourse of casuistry. See, for example, A. E. Malloch, “John Donne and the Casuists,” *Studies in English Literature* 2, no. 1 (1962): 57–76; Dwight Cathcart, *Doubting Conscience: Donne and the Poetry of Moral Argument* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975); Camille Wells Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 133–82; Jeanne M. Shami, “Donne’s Protestant Casuistry: Cases of Conscience in the Sermons,” *Studies in Philology* 80, no. 1 (1983): 53–66; Meg Lota Brown, *Donne and the Politics of Conscience in Early Modern England* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995); and Glen Bowman, “Every Man Is a Church in Himself: The Development of Donne’s Ideas on the Relationship Between Individual Conscience and Human Authority,” *Fides et Historia* 29, no. 1 (1997): 44–57. For a phenomenological approach to Donne’s sermons that anticipates mine, see Gale H. Carrithers Jr., *Donne at Sermons: A Christian Existential World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972). According to Jean M. Shami’s “Donne on Discretion” (*English Literary History* 47, no. 1 [1980]: 48–66), Donne’s nearness effect describes a mysterious but dramatic process of imposing God’s presence on an audience by driving “the history recorded in Scriptures home to each one” of the members of his congregation (50). Dennis Quinn, in “Donne’s Christian Eloquence” (*ELH* 27 [1960]: 276–93), contextualizes Donne’s expressivity in relation to Augustine’s theory that the preacher should imitate scriptural truths, pursuing a mimesis of scriptural reality rather than aiming for persuasion in the classical sense of the term.
4. For a discussion of William Perkins’s claim that sermons should bind the conscience, see Brian Crockett, *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 42.

5. Michael G. Baylor, *Action and Person: Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1977), 170.
6. According to Baylor in *Action and Person*, "Luther did assert that the Last Judgment is simply a confirmation of a judgment which the conscience has already made" (238).
7. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: W. W. Eerdmans, 1989), 3.19.15.
8. *William Perkins, 1558–1602, English Puritanist: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry—"A Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,"* ed. and intro. Thomas F. Merrill (The Hague: Nieuwkoop and B. De Graaf, 1966), 6–7. Subsequent references to this work are cited parenthetically in text.
9. Zachman, *Assurance of Faith*, 100.
10. As Zachman explains in *Assurance of Faith*, "Calvin not only distinguishes the conscience from the mind and understanding, but he also distinguishes the conscience from the will (*voluntas*)" (101). Perkins appears to differ from Calvin insofar as Perkins identifies conscience as a part of the understanding.
11. Cited in John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 36. For a similar formulation in Calvin, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.15.
12. For this point, see Zachman, *Assurance of Faith*, 99.
13. The question of Donne's relation to Calvinism is highly vexed, and it is not my aim in this essay to delineate his notion of conscience in relation to Calvinist theories in precise theological terms. Suffice it to say, for now, that my analysis is generally consistent with Debora Shuger's observation that "Donne's understanding of the conscience . . . as accusatory and as the locus of divine presence . . . derives from Calvin, who defines the 'inward mind' as the 'forum of conscience', or the 'sense of divine judgment, as a witness . . . which does not allow them to hide their sins from being accused before the Judge's tribunal" (*Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture*, reprint of 1990 University of California Press edition [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997], 181). Although Shuger's emphasis on the violent and absolutist aspects of Donne's Calvinism in the sermons has been tempered by Jeanne Shami's "Donne's Sermons and the Absolutist Politics of Quotation," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* (ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi [Conway, AR: UCA, 1995], 380–412), her view that Donne articulates a moderately Calvinist notion of conscience in the sermons remains persuasive. A more systematic analysis of Donne's theology of conscience in the sermons might further clarify Donne's complex relation to the moderate Calvinism of the Jacobean Church.
14. For a discussion of such medieval accounts of conscience, see Wilks, *Idea of Conscience*, 36.
15. For an explanation of the Thomist view of conscience, see Baylor, *Action and Person*, 20–69.
16. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).
17. David F. Krell, "Das Unheimliche: Architectural Sections of Heidegger and Freud," *Research in Phenomenology* 22, no. 1 (1992): 43–61, quotation on 49.
18. Although Donne's nearness effect can be described as uncanny in this limited sense, it differs in important ways from the Freudian sense of the term. Whereas the psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny presupposes that what is returning unbeknownst to the subject is a thought that was repressed by unconscious elements of the ego, Donne is concerned with memories that are suppressed through a conscious act of will. For a

study of the *unheimlich* dimensions of conscience in Shakespeare and Western philosophy more broadly, see Ned Lukacher, *Daemonic Figures: Shakespeare and the Question of Conscience* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994). Although Lukacher's study is essential reading for an understanding of Platonic, Renaissance, modern, and postmodern ideas of conscience, the wide scope of his project results in a homogenizing account of Christian concepts of conscience. For a reading of Donne's representation of sin in the context of Calvinist soteriology, see John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). Whereas Stachniewski is concerned with demonstrating Donne's anxiety about predestination, I am concerned with his account of the phenomenology of conscience.

19. For accounts of the theatrical nature of Donne's sermons and poetry, see H. M. Richmond, "Donne's Master: The Young Shakespeare," *Criticism* 15 (1973): 126–44; Paul W. Harland, "Dramatic Technique and Personae in Donne's Sermons," *ELH* 53, no. 4 (1986): 709–26; and Crockett, *Play of Paradox*, chap. 7. Although Victor Harris, in "John Donne and the Theatre" (*Philological Quarterly* 41 [1962]: 257–69), makes a case for Donne's antipathy toward the theater, he offers substantial evidence for the more commonly held view that the theater had a significant impact on Donne's writing. For other discussions of the relations between the theater and pulpit, see Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theatre in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Martha Tuck Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
20. For Donne's praising of *Volpone*, see Harris, "Donne and the Theatre," 258. According to Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson (*A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999]), "roughly sixty plays have about ninety directions for a *curtain* of which seventy-eight call for the *curtains* to be opened or closed" (62). They also observe that the word "hangings," which Donne uses in place of curtains, was "an infrequently used alternative [in early modern stage directions] for the curtain or arras that hung just in front of the tiring-house wall" (110).
21. *The Tragedie of Tancred and Gismund* (London, 1591), 4.2.970–1000.
22. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet, 1998), 2.2.601–4.
23. My understanding of the character of Conscience derives from Wilks, *Idea of Conscience*, chap. 2.
24. William Perkins and Thomas Heywood, cited in Crockett, *Play of Paradox*, 42.
25. See, for example, Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 103–11; and Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 3: *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15–20* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 176–238.
26. See *Sermons*, 9.12.
27. See Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning, 1985), 113–117.
28. See *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39–40.
29. Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion (1927)," in *Civilization, Society, and Religion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Penguin 1985), 179–80. For a discussion of Freud's

- theory of religion in light of the uncanny, see Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 20–21.
30. For further discussion of the uncanniness of Pauline thought as expressed in Donne's work, see my "Petrarchism and Repentance in John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*," *Modern Philology* 105, no. 3 (2008): 535–69, reprinted in *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 5. Also see the conclusion to my *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2005).
 31. I have modernized the spelling of Donne's terms here. All citations to Donne's poems are from *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Dent and Sons, 1985), and are cited parenthetically by line numbers in text.
 32. John E. Parish, "No. 14 of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*," in *John Donne's Poetry: Authoritative Texts and Criticism*, ed. Arthur L. Clements (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 331. See also my reading of Station XII in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, in Kuchar, *Divine Subjection* (see note 32), 160–65.
 33. Although the dating and addressing of this letter remain conjectural, it is consistent with other epistles of the period, and I see no reason to dispute Edmund Gosse's determinations (see Gosse's *The Life and Letters of John Donne* [Gloucester, England: Peter Smith, 1959], 1:183). In any case, my focus is on the internal rhetorical structure of the letter, not its biographical import per se. For clarification of this and other matters pertaining to Donne's correspondence, we anxiously await the Oxford edition of the letters currently in the works.
 34. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, 1522," in *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1962), 25.
 35. For accounts of this aspect of Luther's thought, see Zachman, *Assurance of Faith*, 19; and Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 135, 159; see also James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 252–53. I am especially indebted to Zachman's formulations of this aspect of Luther's theology.
 36. Thomas M. McDonough, *The Law and the Gospel in Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 30.
 37. To be clear, I am not arguing that Donne is a committed Lutheran on the point of the will at this or any other point in his life. I am simply suggesting that the rhetorical structure of this letter registers the phenomenological effects of Reformation soteriology. My interest here is with recurring rhetorical patterns and the effects they have on Donne's writing, not with biography.
 38. References to Donne's letters are cited in the text by page numbers and are from John Donne, *John Donne Selected Letters*, ed. P. M. Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2002), 30.
 39. Martin Luther, "Bondage of the Will," in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 317.
 40. Goodman Godfrey, *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature* (London, 1616), 81. As several critics have noted, Godfrey's work shows clear signs of having been influenced by Donne's *The Anniversaries*. For the connection between Godfrey and Donne and for a larger bibliography on the topic, see Kuchar, *Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, chap. 6.
 41. John Carey, "John Donne's Newsless Letters," *Essays and Studies* 34 (1981): 45–65.
 42. For a discussion of Donne's phrase "friendships sacraments," see *ibid.*, 54.