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John Donne and Martyrdom

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**Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy in English
Literature**

University of Sussex

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

JOHN DONNE AND THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY

Summary

This thesis contends that John Donne, who was writing at a time when popular martyrologies dominated the nature of religious thought in England, redefines the significance and parameters of martyrdom in defending the Jacobean oath of allegiance. Emphasising the centrality of Donne's preordination prose to his religious and political thought, the argument is divided into three chapters:

1. Donne: Conformist and Christian

This chapter contends that Donne's views on religious assurance ran against the grain of contemporary martyrologies, and that he sought to preserve the capacity of a doubting conscience and thus circumscribe the grounds by which one might be able to claim genuine martyrdom – while simultaneously challenging the recourse to one of the ways that the state could be imperilled in its defence of true, Christian religion.

2. Resisting Resistance: Donne's Case against Church Militancy

Arguing against the popular view that Donne's condemnation of the Society of Jesus is a reaction to the suffering he witnessed within his own family, this chapter places Donne's anti-Jesuitism within a literary and historical tradition which sought to overturn the common precept that acts of resistance against the state could lead to martyrdom.

3. Disassociating Death and Martyrdom: Donne's Unnoble Death

This chapter examines the ways in which Donne challenges the preconception that the martyr is required to seal his or her doctrine with blood, and argues that he does so by explicating the following arguments: first, that death is comforting rather than frightful, and consequently that the act of bringing death upon oneself is not heroic but an expression of the natural desire to alleviate one's suffering; second, that the deaths of those who provoke the state through disobedience are pseudo-martyrs, and that pseudo-martyrdom is a sinful form of suicide; and, finally, that exemplary figures such as Christ and Samson are, in fact, self-homicides, but that their martyrdoms are determined by their glorification of God rather than by their deaths.

Abbreviations

BL – British Library

DOI – Digital Object Identifier

OED – Oxford English Dictionary

DNB – Dictionary of National Biography

MS – Manuscript

STC – Short Title Catalogue

URL – Uniform Resource Locator

The following sources are used frequently throughout this study, and are either cited within the text or referred to by short title:

- I. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Donne are to the following editions:
Pseudo-martyr: Wherein out of certaine propositions and gradations, this conclusion is euicted. That those which are of the Romane religion in this kingdome, may and ought to take the Oath of allegiance (London, 1610; STC 7048)
Deaths duell, or, A consolation to the soule, against the dying life, and liuing death of the body (London, 1632; STC 7031)
Ignatius His Conclave, ed. by T. S. Healy (Oxford: OUP, 1969)
John Donne: Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, ed. by Anthony Raspa (Montreal; London: McGillQueen's University Press, 1975)
Biathanatos, ed. by Michael Rudick and M. Pabst Battin (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1982)
The Complete Poems of John Donne, ed. by Robin Robbins (London; New York: Longman, 2010)
- II. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to patristic sources are taken from *The Early Church Fathers* series, ed. by Alexander Roberts and Philip Schaff (Published online at <<https://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>>)
- III. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Shakespeare are to the Arden editions, in Arden 3 when possible, and otherwise in Arden 2

Further notes

Unless indicated otherwise, all italics are the author's own.

Typographic ligatures have been removed from all references to Robbins's edition of Donne's poetry.

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Introduction

The field of Donne scholarship is one of considerable size, with new studies addressing Donne's life and works produced regularly. Many of these studies are learned and considered, and demonstrate both analytical rigour as well as a profound interest in, and respect for, their subject matter and source material. Yet, and almost alone within Donne studies, it is seemingly customary to begin any substantial discussion of John Donne's *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610) with a joke, an excuse or an apology. Indeed, it is almost mandatory in such studies to cite from, or contribute a defamatory comment to, the repertoire of insults that constitute the text's reputation. On the offence: Sir Geoffrey Keynes states that *Pseudo-Martyr* makes for 'dull reading';¹ Evelyn Mary Simpson claims that it is 'an almost unreadable book written by a man of genius';² and Augustus Jessopp believes that none but a 'monomaniac' would read the argument through.³ On the defence: Victor Houliston has put forward 'An Apology for Donne's *Pseudo-Martyr*';⁴ and Anthony Raspa, the text's only editor, has admitted that, 'for the modern reader, who has been brought up by twentieth-century literary tradition to expect captivating wit and haunting sensibility of Donne [...] *Pseudo-Martyr* seems to move crab-like'.⁵ That there is an academic embarrassment surrounding the text is true; yet, the dates of these comments indicate the direction of the discussion. From dismissals to apologies, *Pseudo-Martyr* has begun to receive grounds for recognition. Based on John R. Roberts's annotated bibliographies of Donne scholarship, in fact, there has been a slow but steady rise in criticism on the text over the years, with discussions that include or focus on *Pseudo-Martyr* having

¹ *Bibliography of Dr. John Donne*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 4.

² *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 2.

³ Quoted in *Prose Works*, p. 179, n. 1.

⁴ This is the title of Houliston's article, which appears in *Review of English Studies*, 27, no. 231 (September 2006), 474-86.

⁵ John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr*, ed. by Anthony Raspa (Montreal & Kingston; London; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. xi. Raspa here refers to Donne's tendency to weave into his predominant argument many interrelated issues.

grown from 0.1% (1912-1967), to 1.6% (1979-1995), to 2.9% (1996-2008).⁶ Such figures may not seem high but they are significant, for they reflect studies that have performed the important task of establishing *Pseudo-Martyr*'s relevance. As such, some articles that have emerged in recent years have broken custom: instead of apologising for *Pseudo-Martyr*, they state unabashedly that Donne's prose works are 'extremely revealing of his thinking on a wide variety of fundamental issues' and that, most probably, 'Donne himself considered such works as *Pseudo-Martyr* his most lasting monuments'.⁷ 'The very desire to belittle *Pseudo-Martyr*', Jesse M. Lander contends, 'betrays an unwillingness to grapple with Donne and his culture'.⁸

Not only did *Pseudo-Martyr* earn Donne the honorary doctorate in 1615 that led to his career as Dean of St Paul's, but it was also composed alongside two other significant prose works: *Biathanatos* (1608-10?), the first known Christian defence of suicide in the English language; and *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), a polemic that was commissioned by King James VI&I. Despite being marginalised in Donne studies, all three of these texts reveal vital information about Donne's life and views.⁹ With a small but growing number of scholars coming to terms with the idea that 'Donne's middle years are the crucial ones',¹⁰ the preordination prose, and by extension the subjects of martyrdom and pseudo-martyrdom, are now acknowledged as being fundamental to understanding Donne's religio-political thought, and for providing new avenues of investigation within Donne studies.

⁶ *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1912-1967* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1973); *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1979-1995* (Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2004); *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1996-2008* (published online at <<http://donnevariorum.tamu.edu>> 2013) [accessed 12.16]. These bibliographies are exceptionally comprehensive, although they do exclude doctoral theses.

⁷ Johann P. Sommerville, 'John Donne the Controversialist: the Poet as Political Thinker', in *John Donne's Professional Lives*, ed. by David Coldough (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 73-95 (pp. 73-74).

⁸ *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 148.

⁹ During the course of this study, I shall refer to these three texts as Donne's preordination prose. This term was coined by Susannah Brietz Monta in her book *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Richard Strier, 'John Donne Awry and Squint: The "Holy Sonnets"', *Modern Philology*, 86, no. 4 (May 1989), 357-84 (p. 365).

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

(John 17:22-23)

When Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) was executed for refusing Henry VIII's oath of supremacy, his death established a new cause for martyrdom: that of defending the unity of the church and the authority of the pope.¹¹ This cause, which differed from the traditional understanding of martyrdom as an act of witnessing through death during the conversion of a country or for personal beliefs, was first set out and detailed by Reginald Pole in 1536. Pole 'argued that Christ had established the Church on the foundation of Peter, and that the authority vested in Peter had continued in his successors', which meant it 'was therefore impossible to usurp that authority because the Church was the whole community of Christendom united in and through the papacy'.¹² According to Anne Dillon, this 'radically new type of martyrdom' was 'born out of the Reformation':

Thomas More and those executed by Henry died because they believed that to acknowledge the king's claim to supreme authority over the English Church would have been to deny the truth of that unity or papal authority.¹³

The Reformation had split the church into what many took to be a true form and a false form. For Pole and More, reformers were no longer a part of the true church, and any act of conformity that involved a limitation or renegotiation of papal authority should be considered as a matter of heresy. Taking the oath of supremacy could therefore lead Catholics to eternal damnation. 'In the saving of my body', More told his daughter Margaret Roper,

¹¹ Nicholas Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sr. Thomas Moore, Knight, Sometyms Lord High Chancellor of England*, ed. by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock and R. W. Chambers, *Early English Text Society*, n. 186 (London, 1932; repr. 1963), p. 209; Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 38.

¹² Dillon, p. 27.

¹³ Dillon, p. 27.

‘should stand the loss of my soul’.¹⁴ At the heart of the battle between the churches was a claim for custody over religious truth: the core of Christianity for which the early martyrs had sacrificed their lives. During the Reformation, this religious truth was once again under threat of being demolished or purloined by heretics; martyrs were required to sacrifice themselves not to establish the foundation of Christianity, as the early martyrs had done, but to distinguish and defend the true Christian cause from the false one. Any claim to martyrdom under such conditions, as Dillon stipulates, would always be subjective and could only be made within the ‘essential polarity of its antithesis, the pseudomartyr’.¹⁵

During his lifetime, Thomas More described as pseudo-martyrs those reformers who had witnessed to, what he believed was, a false cause, and constructed a contrasting image of the Catholic martyr: a humble, intellectual individual, with an informed conscience and no lust for the glory of martyrdom.¹⁶ Although he was sure that the oath was to be resisted, he spent a great deal of time during his imprisonment contemplating whether or not a person may volunteer for martyrdom under these, or any, conditions. Fearing that such an act might, in fact, constitute suicide, he decided that he would not denounce the oath verbally until he was confident that he would face execution for not conforming: ‘I have not been a man of such holy living’, he confessed, ‘as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God for my presumption might suffer me to fall, and therefore I put not myself forward, but draw back’.¹⁷ Paul D. Green argues that, despite eventually reproving Parliament’s right to legislate religion, More ‘did not seek out martyrdom’: ‘it was thrust upon him, and he accepted it rather than violate his religious scruples’.¹⁸ Indeed, More may not have been so bold as to consider himself a martyr, but he became, posthumously, the exemplar of his own martyrial

¹⁴ *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth Francis Rogers, Yale ed. of the Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1961; repr. 1967), p. 237.

¹⁵ Dillon, p. 19.

¹⁶ Dillon, p. 24.

¹⁷ *St Thomas More*, p. 253.

¹⁸ ‘Suicide, Martyrdom, and Thomas More’, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 19 (1972), 135-55 (pp. 155, 153).

construction, a man synonymous with his own works on martyrdom, and a central figure in the ‘battle of martyrologies between the Catholic Church and the English reformers’.¹⁹ For Catholics, he had set the standard for refusing to acknowledge the monarch as Supreme Head of the Church of England. For their loyalist opponents, he was to be considered a pseudo-martyr.

Despite their differing stances, the conventions used by Catholic and Protestant martyrologists during the period were by and large very similar.²⁰ Indeed, a certain ‘martyrial archetype’ emerges from these texts, composed of three predominant elements that are appropriated by both sides. First, and most importantly, is what Susannah Brietz Monta terms the ‘institutional incarnation’ and ‘visible manifestation of one’s faith’:²¹ religious assurance. This is the idea of the martyr as a model adherent of her or his respective religious institution, one who is willing to witness publicly to her or his faith. Second, and a corollary of the first, is resistance to a persecutory and heretical state in the face of enforced conformity. It is often supposed, in fact, both in early modern sources, and in modern criticism of these sources, that martyrdom could not exist without persecution.²² Finally, these martyrologies suggest the idea of the martyr witnessing to her or his faith through physical suffering and death. These elements—religious assurance, resistance and death—which together make up a martyrial archetype that could be adapted by those on both sides of the debate, did not necessarily reflect all of the views on martyrdom held by Catholics and Protestants in contemporary society. Yet, the conflict between the martyrologies had the power to induce religious divisions as well as influence perceptions and behaviour.²³ Through the ‘retelling of what were quintessentially the deaths of martyrs’, Peter Lake and Michael

¹⁹ Raspa, p. xv.

²⁰ Monta, pp. 13-30.

²¹ Monta, p. 35.

²² See Sarah Covington, *The Trail of Martyrdom: Persecution and Resistance in Sixteenth-Century England* (Notre Dame; Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 4-26.

²³ Monta, p. 3

Questier argue, a tradition had emerged that if ‘it walked like a martyr and talked like a martyr, the natural conclusion to draw was that what had taken place was, indeed, a martyrdom’.²⁴

It is perhaps ironic that seventy-five years after his death, Thomas More’s great grand-nephew John Donne would interrupt the pseudo-martyr debate, in which his ancestor had featured so prominently, and denounce the martyrial tradition that had been initiated by More’s death.²⁵ In 1610, Donne published his *Pseudo-Martyr*, a text that simultaneously defends the Jacobean oath of allegiance, which was the ‘ideological equivalent of the oath of supremacy’,²⁶ and attacks the new cause for martyrdom. In claiming the term ‘pseudo-martyr’ for the title of a text about treason, and thus equating the pseudo-martyr with the traitor rather than with the heretic, Donne extirpates this term from its religious context and places it squarely within the secular domain. His intention to politicise the pseudo-martyr is made clear in his prefatory remark that ‘it is not of Diuinity, but meere of temporall matters, that I write’ (sig. B3v). With a view to quelling the divisiveness of the Reformation-induced martyr tradition, the text re-positions, rather than reverses, the rhetoric of pseudo-martyrdom that was being appropriated by conflicting martyrologies. Unlike John Foxe (1516/17-1587) and Richard Verstegan (1550-1640), who contributed to the debate with martyrologies that were furnished with illustrations and which could be suitable for a general readership, Donne maintained his focus on a scholarly reader that would have to work hard to understand the complexity of his argument.

The same is true also for Donne’s *Biathanatos*, which, as a text that is not as confined to ‘temporall matters’ as *Pseudo-Martyr*, deals more directly with divine law and the theology

²⁴ *The Antichrist’s Lend Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 281. This comment is made specifically with Catholic martyrologies in mind, though I would extend this to include all martyrologies that contributed to the construction of the early modern martyrial archetype.

²⁵ Contrast Raspa, p. xvii, who argues that, in writing *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne ‘contributed to the momentum of a continuing martyrial controversy’.

²⁶ Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 106.

of martyrdom. This text was published posthumously against the author's wishes by his son in 1644. The reason for Donne's reluctance to publish *Biathanatos* is due, he explains, to the 'misinterpretable' nature of his argument on suicide, which is in danger of being either misunderstood or oversimplified.²⁷ Donne's anxiety regarding the reception of the text is reflected in his description of four different types of reader that he sets out in the 'Preface': there are the 'sponges, which attract all without distinguishing; hourglasses, which receive and pour out as fast; bags, which retain only the dregs and spices and let the wine escape; and sieves, which retain the best only'. It is only the last type of reader, Donne states, that 'may be hereby enlightened' (p. 43). As such, Donne displaces the rhetoric of the martyrial archetype, which had become a site of conflict between Catholics and Protestants, and seeks to replace this with the reader's own conscience and careful consideration. He thus eliminates, rather than appropriates, those conventions typical of the pseudo-martyr debate that could be inverted by opponents to supplant truth with heresy.

It is my contention that John Donne, in fact, renegotiates the parameters of martyrdom in order to collapse the opposition between Catholics and Protestants that arose after the Reformation split the church. At the centre of this argument is Donne's effort to recover the true meaning of church unity: a meaning which, he determines, has been misaligned, displaced or tarnished in the conflict between differing martyrologies. The 'principall and direct scope and purpose' of *Pseudo-Martyr*, he states, 'is the vnity and peace of [Christ's] Church' (sig. B2v). Following the Reformation, the monarch and the pope had each come to be considered by the adherents of their respective institutions as the predominant figure of Christian unification. These authorities were thus often viewed in direct opposition to one another. While the English Jesuit Robert Persons (1546-1610) encouraged Catholics to boycott Church of England services so as not to poison their souls with heresy, James VI&I insisted on the importance of uniformity within the state,

²⁷ Letter to Sir Robert Ker, quoted in Rudick and Battin, p. 4.

proclaiming that ‘Vnitie [is] the perfection of al things’.²⁸ In contrast to the prevalent arguments over religious truth and appropriate religious conduct, however, Donne argues that the unity of the church cannot be contained in one earthly institution alone; it is to be found at the point where the state, the church and the individual conscience converge – not where they collide. In this respect, neither the monarch nor the pope constitute the locus of Christian ‘unity’, but are single ‘units’ that contribute to the whole and are therefore co-dependent:

It is intire man that God hath care of, and not the soule alone; therefore his first worke was the body, and the last worke shall bee the glorification thereof. He hath not deliuered vs ouer to a Prince onely, as to a Physitian, and to a Lawyer, to looke to our bodies and estates; and to the Priest onely, as to a Confessor, to looke to, and examine our soules, but the Priest must aswel endeouour, that we liue vertuously and innocently in this life for society here, as the Prince, by his lawes keepes vs in the way to heauen: for thus they accomplish a *Regale Sacerdotium* [royal priesthood];²⁹ when both doe both; for we are sheepe to them both, and they in diuers relations sheepe to one another.

(sig. G3r)

The priest and the monarch may be distinct from one another, but they are united in the common cause of Christianity. In order to maintain the unity of the church, according to Donne’s argument, both Catholics and Protestants are obliged to concede somewhat on their claims to true religion.

This interpretation of Donne’s thought is conversant with, and serves to reinforce, the image of a moderate Donne that has been popularised in modern scholarship. Following Jeanne Shami’s discovery of the Gunpowder sermon manuscript in 1992 and her subsequent book, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit*, the idea of Donne as a man of religious moderation came to challenge, and in some ways supersede, the long tradition of Donnean criticism, led by scholars such as John Carey and Helen Gardner, that

²⁸ *A briefe discourse containing certaine reasons, why Catholikes refuse to goe to church* (England, 1601), first part; *The true lane of free monarchies: or The reciprocke and mutuall dutie betwixt a free king, and his naturall subiectes*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1598; STC 14409), sig. B1r, respectively.

²⁹ Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9: ‘But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people’.

characterises Donne as a man torn between Catholicism and Protestantism.³⁰ In demonstrating how the hitherto neglected sermons allow a considerable insight into Donne's religious and political thought, Shami's book argues that, in the sermons, Donne aims to 'expand rather than limit the grounds of conformity to the Church of England' using a 'rhetoric of moderation' that is 'tactically *inclusive* rather than *exclusive*'.³¹ This language of religious moderation, as Shami herself notes (briefly and without much further comment), is prefigured in Donne's preordination prose. Indeed, if Shami's general argument is understood in line with a close and contextual reading of *Pseudo-Martyr*, it is possible to further expand on my previous contestation that Donne collapses the opposition between Catholics and Protestants. As any careful reading of *Pseudo-Martyr* should make abundantly clear, Donne, while he focuses most of his fire on the Society of Jesus, also attacks radical Protestantism. This need not lead to the conclusion that Donne was, therefore, torn between Catholicism and Protestantism; it need not be read as pointing to a deep ambiguity in Donne's faith. Rather, it points to the fact that a Catholic/Protestant binary was not the only form of binary system which could both draw divisions between, and seek to create unities amongst, different people in early modern England. The text of *Pseudo-Martyr*, even more so when read in its specific historical context and alongside Donne's other works, points to Donne's drawing of an alternate conformist/recusant opposition, one that allows him to extirpate pseudo-martyrdom from its religious connotations and align martyrdom with conformity. This form of boundary-creation could allow a subject's allegiance to be viewed as separate from her or his religious conscience. While the dominant Catholic/Protestant distinction could often result in a crude mapping of political views onto religious beliefs,

³⁰ Carey, in his influential (though oft-disputed) book *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (Faber and Faber: London, 1981), p. 25, states rather dramatically that 'there can be no mistake about the agony of Donne's choice. And he chose hell. That is to say, he deserted the Catholic God'. On the contrary, Gardner, *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, ed. by Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 131, argues that Donne's 'devotional temper is Catholic, but his devotion is a "rectified devotion"; his theological position is Protestant'.

³¹ *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), p. 19.

Donne, by representing the conformist camp in a ‘tactically *inclusive*’ manner, sought to include Catholics and Protestants in a common camp of outward, political obedience to the state.

It is in the analysis of this central component of Donne’s religious and political thought that *Pseudo-Martyr* can be interrogated with great benefit for advancing broader discussions on Donne’s religious moderation. As a *quid pro quo*, studies on Donne’s religious moderation have equipped us with a vocabulary and literary context with which to approach, recognise and interpret the complexities of Donne’s preordination prose. Such a task further benefits from, and should be encouraged by, the tremendous developments in modern historical investigations into the politics and practices of early Stuart England. At the forefront of these studies are the ground-breaking works on the Jacobean oath of allegiance and Catholic loyalism by Michael Questier,³² the extensive works on absolutism and sovereignty undertaken, in particular, by Glenn Burgess, Conal Condren, and Johann P. Sommerville,³³ and the excellent insights into the practice and construction of martyrdom provided by Sarah Covington, Anne Dillon, Susannah Brietz Monta, Peter Lake & Michael Questier, and Alexandra Walsham.³⁴ Together, these studies enable us to conceive of martyrdom/pseudo-martyrdom not only as a discourse itself, made up of certain elements which are articulated as being a single whole and given the appearance of unity, but also as part of a broader set of Christian discourses and ideologies. To focus on the topic of martyrdom/pseudo-martyrdom at a time when these ideas had a particular importance and

³² ‘Catholic Loyalism in Early Stuart England’, *English Historical Review*, 123, no. 504 (October 2008), 1132-65; ‘Loyalty, Religion and State Power in Early Modern England: English Romanism and the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance’, *The Historical Journal*, 40, no. 2 (June 1997), 311-29.

³³ *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1996); *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Royalists & Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640* (London; New York: Longman, 1999), respectively.

³⁴ *The Trail of Martyrdom; The Construction of Martyrdom; Literature and Martyrdom; The Antichrist’s Lend Hat; and Charitable hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), respectively.

played a prominent role in the everyday life of the early modern subject, is also to focus on central contemporary notions of faith and sovereignty.

Thus, the aforementioned historical studies light the way in unpicking some of Donne's intricate views on absolutism and martyrdom, which makes texts like *Pseudo-Martyr* more accessible to us than ever before. Yet, while *Pseudo-Martyr* has, as I argued above, received greater recognition in recent years, the nature of the critical engagement with the text still remains quite limited. This is due, in part, to the fact that the text is usually studied in isolation from Donne's other works. Indeed, since studies tend to be confined to positioning Donne and his political thought in relation to their immediate historical context, and since a range of interpretations of his political stance, from apostasy to absolutism, have already been put forward, there seems to be a struggle to find something new to say about the text.³⁵ Raising this point is not to undervalue the contributions made by studies in this area, but to indicate that there is wider scope for using texts like *Pseudo-Martyr* to advance Donne studies as well as to point to broader themes in early modern scholarship.

There are three studies in particular that demonstrate the value of reading Donne's preordination prose in relation to Donne's oeuvre and, indeed, an even wider literary context. Susannah Brietz Monta has situated *Pseudo-Martyr* within a broad discussion of the literary

³⁵ For those taking an absolutist line with regards to *Pseudo-Martyr*, and more broadly within Donne's works, see Sommerville, 'John Donne the Controversialist', in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, pp. 73-95; Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983; repr. 1989), p. 219; and Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 183. For those who argue that *Pseudo-Martyr* is only a partially obedient text, see Michael Holmes, *Metaphysical Literature: Nature, Custom and Strange Desires* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Phebe Jensen, "'The Obedience due to Princes': Absolutism in *Pseudo-Martyr*", *Renaissance and Reformation*, 19, no. 3 (1995), 47-62; Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Annabel Patterson, 'All Donne', in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Olga Valbuena, 'Casuistry, Martyrdom, and the Allegiance Controversy in Donne's "*Pseudo-Martyr*"', *Religion & Literature*, 32, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 49-80. Those who argue for Donne's Catholicism, including Dennis Flynn, 'Irony in Donne's *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*', *Recusant History*, 12, iss. 1 (May 1974), 49-69, have generally viewed *Pseudo-Martyr* as being ironic or subversive. This argument is predicated on the inconsistencies between the polemical text and Donne's unpublished work *Biathanatos*; an area that provides fertile soil for further investigation, especially if Donne's ironic *Paradoxes and Problems* are taken into the equation.

practices associated with early modern martyrdom, drawing out similarities between the text and some of Donne's poems, and has compared Donne's approach to the topic of suffering and persecution to that of Robert Southwell.³⁶ Monta finds that 'Southwell's and Donne's works represent two distinct ways of responding to the ongoing English Catholic persecution', whereby Southwell 'seeks to find grace in pain' and Donne seeks to 'redefine suffering and its concomitant rewards so as to make actual martyrdom unnecessary'.³⁷ Brook Conti has presented a strong argument for Donne's allegiance to the Church of England by setting *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1621) side by side,³⁸ and Jesse M. Lander examines *Pseudo-Martyr* in relation to Donne's *An Anatomy of the World* to argue that 'these two books, one a religious polemic and the other a set of three poems, share a single author, and this generic range in an individual writer indicates that poetry and polemic were not entirely discrete endeavors, given over to specialists committed to one or the other.' Donne's work 'points to the cultural affinity between poetry and polemic, to the ways in which both endeavors are animated by similar concerns'.³⁹ Such studies should remind us that history informs our reading of literature quite as much as literature informs our understanding of history. Donne's advocacy of a significant range of interconnected views and forms, as highlighted by these critics, emerges out of the events that were taking place in early Stuart England. The nexus of Donne's thought in *Pseudo-Martyr* is the 1606 oath of allegiance, and it is through a discussion of this legislation that Donne is able to reconceptualise martyrdom and examine state conformity.

It is therefore possible to move beyond an assessment of Donne's response to the Jacobean oath into an examination of how this political event could be used as a site on which literary themes could be crafted and hewn; themes that could, in turn, influence

³⁶ Monta, pp. 117-57.

³⁷ Monta, p. 150.

³⁸ *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), chap. 2.

³⁹ Lander, p. 145.

perceptions within contemporary society. This idea raises a question as to how oaths, as a facet of a religio-political system, on the one hand, and the literary practices built around them on the other, simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, early modern literature. In fact, in a recent study on Shakespeare, Andrew Hadfield has argued that if Shakespeare's plays are read in a certain way, 'a pattern will emerge enabling us to see it as a drama structured around the particular anxieties oaths and promises precipitated by the religious conflicts of the early years of James' reign'.⁴⁰ The recent books by John Kerrigan and James Shapiro, *Shakespeare's Binding Language* and *1606: William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*, respectively, are a testament to the growing interest in literary works produced in the wake of the Jacobean oath, as well as to the relevance of oath literature in and of itself. Although Shakespeare's plays provide a fruitful source for detecting the themes and conventions of this literature, the conversation need not be limited to one playwright. Not only can Hadfield's theory be extended to the prominent theme of oath-making and -breaking in Donne's poetry and prose, but also to the corpus of literature, both literary and polemical, that emerged in the years following the events of 1605. Viewing such works as part of a historically-anchored 'oath genre' allows a new way of grouping literature based on patterns of anxiety triggered by oaths, promises and fidelity, and enables us to reassess the ways in which we read Donne's prose – both in relation to works that he produced in other forms and in relation to works produced by other writers. This approach is particularly useful for a text like *Pseudo-Martyr*, which breaks conventional forms as a piece of political literature that is not quite a pamphlet and not quite a tract.

Thus, the present study aims to examine how Donne, through an exploration of the oath of allegiance, produces a work that displaces the conventions of the martyrial archetype as set out above. It further contends that Donne's main purpose for so doing is to counter the new cause for martyrdom, and interrupt the pseudo-martyr debate, in order to direct

40 'Bad faith in *All's Well That Ends Well*', *Palgrave Communications*, 2:16051 (2016; DOI: 10.1057/palcomms.2016.51), 1-7 (p. 2).

readers back to the first, and for Donne, the only, true cause for martyrdom: the foundation of Christianity – the ‘vnity of the God-head, or the Trinity of the persons’ that comprise the ‘*Elements* of the Christian Religion, of which it was fram’d and complexioned’ (*PM*, sig. F4v). Chapter 1 argues that there is a syndetic relationship in Donne’s works between religious truth, conformity and the doubting conscience. The basis of this chapter is an establishment of Donne’s absolutism and an exploration of his view that the state, rather than the church, offers the best defence of religion. Chapter 2 argues against the popular view that Donne’s condemnation of the Society of Jesus is a reaction to the suffering he witnessed within his own family, and seeks to place Donne’s anti-Jesuitism within a literary and historical tradition that sought to overturn the common precept that acts of resistance against the state could lead to martyrdom. And, finally, chapter 3 argues that Donne firmly disassociates death and martyrdom in explicating the following arguments: first, that death is comforting rather than frightful, and consequently that the act of bringing death upon oneself is not heroic but an expression of the natural desire to alleviate one’s suffering; second, that the deaths of those who provoke the state through disobedience are pseudo-martyrs, and that pseudo-martyrdom is a sinful form of self-murder; and, finally, that exemplary figures such as Christ and Samson are, in fact, self-homicides, but that their martyrdoms are determined by their glorification of God rather than by their deaths. By applying Donne’s extensive prose theories to some of his better-known works, and by assessing these ideas in relation to their literary and historical context, I hope that this study will reveal new ramifications of Donne’s oeuvre that will enable us to speculate more broadly on his attitude towards obedience, salvation and death.

CHAPTER 1

Donne: Conformist and Christian

St Augustine argued influentially that ‘it is not the punishment but the cause that makes the martyr’.⁴¹ Since Christian institutions are founded on the ability to distinguish between true religion and heresy, the heroes of early modern martyrologies are typically presented as moral exemplars of their respective institutions whose religious assurance and testimony on the scaffold are given as evidence of the true faith. In his *Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church* (first published in 1563), a text that had a significant impact on shaping the notion of a Protestant martyr in the English imagination, John Foxe associates religious confidence with outward actions that supposedly reveal the inner convictions of the conscience.⁴² The primary function of this martyrology was to counter the Catholic objection that Protestantism was not founded on true doctrine. The histories it contains, detailing the spiritual superiority of those who witnessed publicly for the true church, could operate as a powerful tool of edification or conversion for others.⁴³ With Foxe’s narrative originally ending in 1558, celebrating the point at which Elizabeth ascended to the throne and brought an end to the Marian persecutions, the text supported the Elizabethan Settlement by portraying the Church of England as the true church.⁴⁴ Like John Bale, whose *Image of bothe Churches* (c. 1545) provided an important foundation for the *Acts*,⁴⁵ Foxe aimed to

⁴¹ ‘Psalm XXXV’, *St. Augustine: Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, p. 184.

⁴² See Monta, pp. 13-21.

⁴³ Covington, p. 25.

⁴⁴ David Loades, ‘Introduction: John Foxe and the Editors’, in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. by David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar Press, [1997(?)]), pp. 1-11 (p. 3). A more sceptical view on the topic is presented by Damian Nussbaum, ‘Appropriating Martyrdom: Fears of Renewed Persecution and the 1632 edition of *Acts and Monuments*’, in *John Foxe*, ed. by Loades, pp.178-91 (p.190), who argues that Foxe was not keen on the Elizabethan settlement, and that his ‘attitude to the Church of England after Elizabeth’s accession was a complex one’.

⁴⁵ For Bale’s influence on Foxe see Dillon, p. 31; and Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 55.

demonstrate a continuity based on persecution between Protestantism and the early Church.⁴⁶

The trouble with representations of martyrdom, however, is that the difference between true religion and heresy changes in relation to each person's perspective. As Anne Dillon writes, 'one man's martyr must necessarily be another man's heretic'.⁴⁷ Recent studies on martyrdom have thus highlighted, in particular, that the early modern martyr 'functions as a rhetorical device, a fecund lexicon through which the writers and image-makers from opposing doctrinal positions define their positions and mark out their differences across the religious divide'.⁴⁸ In 1585, Nicholas Sander produced *De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani*, an influential text that laid the foundation for ensuing Catholic histories and counter-martyrologies.⁴⁹ As the first Catholic text to describe as martyrs those executed for rebellion or for supporting the papal Bull *Regnans in excelsis*, Sander presents Anne Boleyn as a heretical and deformed monster who seduced Henry VIII and subjected England to Protestant error.⁵⁰ Two years later in Antwerp, Richard Verstegan published his *Theatrum crudelitatum haereticorum nostri temporis* (Theatre of the Cruelties of the heretics of our time), which inverted the *Acts and Monuments* by depicting the brutality of the Protestant regime. In the battle for rhetorical mastery over true religion, the martyrial archetype of an individual who exhibits religious assurance in the face of persecution could be adapted to suit Protestant martyrs like Lady

⁴⁶ Loades, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Dillon, p. 3. David Lee Miller, *Dreams of the Burning Child: Sacrificial Sons and the Father's Witness* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 108, also notes that 'Foxe's martyrology reached Catholic polemicists who challenged its version of events, competing for rhetorical mastery of the pathos stirred by his tales'.

⁴⁸ Dillon, p. 19. For some of the most erudite modern studies on the construction of martyrdom, in addition to Dillon's, see Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature*, at length; Covington, at length; Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious ideology and cultural fantasy: Catholic and anti-Catholic discourses in early modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), at length; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Margaret Clitherow, Catholic Nonconformity, martyrology and the Politics of Religious Change in Elizabethan England, *Past & Present*, 185 (November 2004), 43-90; Candace Lines, "'Secret Violence': Becket, More, and the Scripting of Martyrdom', *Religion and Literature*, 32, no. 2 (Summer, 2000), 11-28; and Walsham, *Charitable hatred*, at length.

⁴⁹ For the complicated publishing history and impact of Sander's text, see Christopher Highley, "'A Pestilent and Seditious Book': Nicholas Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani* and Catholic Histories of the Reformation', in *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. by Paulina Kewes (San Marino: UPCCP [distributor], 2006), pp. 147-99.

⁵⁰ Dillon, p. 13; Highley, p. 158.

Jane Grey (1537-1554), who, being blindfolded, calmly felt her own way to the block,⁵¹ as well as Catholic martyrs such as Margaret Clitherow (1556-1586), who had performed ‘daringly public performances of Catholic zeal’.⁵² One therefore needed to be careful to distinguish between martyrs and their pseudo-martyr counterparts, those heretics who merely imitated the ideal behaviour of true witnesses.⁵³

By the early seventeenth-century, *Acts and Monuments* had faced over fifty years’ worth of Catholic criticism highlighting Foxe’s errors, and, due to the complicated publishing history, which saw various revisions, deletions and omissions, the text had come to seem unreliable and outdated.⁵⁴ Catholic martyrologies, having faced a similar tirade of counter-arguments by this point, were also being received with comparable doubts and suspicions. Jesse M. Lander argues that the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 ‘provided a new motive for anti-popery’, sparking the publication of an *English Martyrologe* in 1608, which listed the true Roman Catholic martyrs of the sixteenth century and which ‘helped to reanimate sectarian disputes about the proper definition of martyrdom’.⁵⁵ That there was a ‘renewed interest in the controversy over martyrdom’ is further evinced by the publication of a new edition of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* in 1610.⁵⁶ There was another factor, however, that increased the demand for renewed discussions on the topic of martyrdom, this being the introduction of the 1606 oath of allegiance. This provision of the Popish Recusants Act, which was enforced as a response to the Gunpowder Plot, controversially required Catholics to acknowledge the authority of the king over that of the pope, and was phrased as follows:

⁵¹ John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*, 2nd edn (London, 1583; STC 11225), p. 1626.

⁵² Lake and Questier, ‘Margaret Clitherow’, 67. See also, Dillon, pp. 277-322.

⁵³ For an excellent discussion on the pseudo-martyr debate from 1523-1570, see Dillon, pp. 18-71.

⁵⁴ For the various revisions, errors, Catholic attacks and printing limitations (such as a lack of paper) that affected the quality and shaping of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, as well as a discussion on the multiple authors that contributed to the *Acts*, see Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chaps 5 and 8. These chapters deal with the making of the 1570 and 1583 edition, respectively.

⁵⁵ p. 149.

⁵⁶ Lander, p. 149.

I do from my heart abhor, detest and abjure as impious and heretical this damnable doctrine and position that princes which be excommunicated and deprived by the pope may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or any whatsoever. And I do believe and in my conscience am resolved, that neither the pope nor any person whatsoever hath power to absolve me of this oath [...]. And all these things I do plainly and sincerely acknowledge and swear, according to these express words by me spoken, and according to the plain and common sense and understanding of the same words without any equivocation or mental evasion or secret reservation whatsoever.⁵⁷

In associating the pope with such terms as ‘impious’, ‘heretical’ and ‘damnable’, the phrasing of the oath, as well as the sweeping dismissal of the pope’s authority both to overthrow an excommunicated king and to give absolution, meant that a swearer would take an active role in limiting and redefining the pope’s jurisdiction and could possibly commit heresy in the process. Further, even if the swearer did not regard the deposing power as a matter of faith, s/he would have to condemn other Catholics (including some former occupants of the papal chair) as heretics, despite the Roman Catholic belief that ‘none but the Pope had the authority to declare a doctrine heretical unless it was clearly contrary to the creeds and the councils’.⁵⁸ On this point of heresy, Victor Houlston notes, ‘the head of the English state and governor of the English church had overreached himself’.⁵⁹

Having recognised the danger inherent in a legal measure that had the potential to fully bind the conscience by preventing ‘equivocation’, ‘mental evasion’ and ‘secret reservation’, Pope Paul V banned the taking of the oath in 1606 and again in 1607, which meant that Catholics who were tendered the oath were forced to declare publicly whether their loyalty lay with the pope or with the state.⁶⁰ If it lay with the former, the fear was

⁵⁷ The text of the oath is taken from J. P. Kenyon, *The Stuart Constitution, 1603-1688*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 170-71.

⁵⁸ Houlston, ‘Apology’, 478.

⁵⁹ ‘Apology’, 478. A similar point is made in Sommerville, ‘John Donne the Controversialist’, in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, p. 75.

⁶⁰ Although relatively few people were tendered the oath in the years after the oath passed into law, compared to the years after 1610 during which the tendering of the oath briefly escalated, the consequences of having to swear the oath still generated much anxiety. Todd Butler, ‘Equivocation, Cognition, and Political Authority in Early Modern England’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 54, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 132-54 (pp.135-136), notes that the stipulation that a swearer take the oath without any form of equivocation undercut Catholic arguments such as that put forward by Robert Persons, that ‘affirmations or denials of any factual proposition

execution for treason. If it rested with the latter, the fear was eternal damnation.⁶¹ Such a dilemma for Catholic subjects dated back to 1534 with Henry VIII's oath of supremacy, and was reinforced by the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. For recusant Catholics, these legal measures, which were considered as subverting the church and its practices, meant that the state could not be considered as separate from that church.

John Donne produced *Pseudo-Martyr*, his most extensive discussion on the topic of martyrdom, in the wake of the oath of allegiance. The title of the work, as Anthony Raspa states, was 'au courant', since the word was being 'bandied about by disputants in the current battle of martyrologies between the Catholic Church and the English reformers'.⁶² While Raspa is surely right to call this polemical text 'the first major English reformed statement on martyrdom after Foxe's *Acts*', some consideration must be given to the conclusion that Donne's aim was to 'turn the current of the controversy over the martyrologies against the Roman disputants'.⁶³ Since the pseudo-martyr exists within a binary opposition (true religion/false religion), Raspa's view that there is as an 'implicit suggestion' in the text 'that Donne is still trying to convince himself that his religious convictions are settled' presents a half-formed dichotomy.⁶⁴ This evaluation assumes that the pseudo-martyr is the dominant value in the text against which Donne's religious truth is, or can begin to be, defined. In order to re-evaluate and, indeed, re-locate *Pseudo-Martyr*'s position within the 'battle of martyrologies', I would like to reverse Raspa's assumption by suggesting that the controlling value in the text is in fact true faith, and that this value can be found at the heart, rather than on the periphery, of Donne's argument.

depend primarily on the "internall actions and operations of the mind" since 'God maintains access to the speaker's entire thought and therefore affirms its truth'.

⁶¹ For further discussion on the drafting of the oath and the penalties for refusal, see Questier, 'Catholic Loyalism', 1132-65; and Clarence J. Ryan, 'The Jacobean Oath of Allegiance and English Lay Catholics', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 28, no. 2 (1942), 159-83.

⁶² Raspa, p. xv.

⁶³ Raspa, pp. xvii, xv, respectively.

⁶⁴ Raspa, p. xl.

As a starting point, Donne's use of the word 'Christian' (instead of 'Protestant') in the biographical sections of *Pseudo-Martyr* has attracted considerable speculation about the author's religion. Like Richard Strier, who believes that this term denotes a 'suspension of commitment' to a particular institution,⁶⁵ Brooke Conti argues that it demonstrates the author's 'refusal to choose' between Catholicism and Protestantism; that it implies a 'nonidentity' or a '(non)position' and thus an 'unsettled [religious] status'.⁶⁶ Conti refers in particular to a passage from the 'Preface', in which Donne excuses his 'forwardnes' if he should

seeme to any to haue intruded and vsurped the office of others, in writing of Diuinity and spirituall points, hauing no ordinary calling to that function. For, to haue alwaies abstained from this declaration of my selfe, had beene to betray, and to abandon, and prostitute my good name to their misconceiuings and imputations; who thinke presently, that hee hath no Religion, which dares not call his Religion by some newer name then Christian.

(sig. B3r)

In contrast to Strier and Conti's interpretation of the term 'Christian' as a near-empty classifier,⁶⁷ Achsah Guibbory writes that in *Pseudo-Martyr* Donne 'chose a generic, *inclusive* definition of his religious identity [...] as if he had matured from an earlier sense of being part of a vulnerable, persecuted religious group towards an inclusive, ecumenical identity'.⁶⁸ Guibbory's view is reinforced by Alison Shell and Arnold Hunt in relation to a letter written during the same year of *Pseudo-Martyr*'s composition, in which Donne states that 'Religion is Christianity': by 'contemporary standards,' they argue, 'this was a boldly inclusive definition

⁶⁵ *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and the Renaissance Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 122-23. In an earlier essay, 'John Donne Awry and Squint', Strier is rather more assertive about Donne's religious position in *Pseudo-Martyr*, arguing that the text 'is certainly by a man who sees himself as a Protestant, but its anti-Catholicism—as opposed to its attack specifically on the Jesuits—is quite mild' and that as the text proceeds it 'grows more insistent on "the exercise of morall vertue here in this life"' (p. 365).

⁶⁶ Conti, p. 59. Raspa argues that there is as an 'implicit suggestion that Donne is still trying to convince himself that his religious convictions are settled' (*Pseudo-Martyr*, p. xl).

⁶⁷ Conti has skilfully analysed Donne's syntax in order to show that Donne is allying himself with the 'hee' in this quotation (*Conversion and Confession*, p. 59).

⁶⁸ *Returning to John Donne* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 214-15.

of religion'.⁶⁹ The supposition here is that Donne is using the words 'Christian' and 'Christianity' as terms that encompass, and supposedly embrace, all denominations – that he is overlooking schism in a sweeping gesture of religious toleration. At one extreme, then, Donne's declaration that 'I am a Christian' (sig. ¶1r) can be interpreted as an absence or negation of religious commitment (as if he could not choose between Catholicism and Protestantism, or did not wish to do so publicly), and, at another, can be considered as a declaration of a new, liberal religious identity (as if he no longer needed to).

There is, however, a third and more likely possibility, which is that Donne is using the term in its traditional sense to mean, simply, that he is a follower of Christ's teachings. The appearance of the words 'Christian' and 'Christianity' in early modern literature is not, after all, particularly remarkable; a search on the *Historical Texts digital archive* for 'Christian OR Christianity', from 1500-1650, produces approximately 12,500 results, and a sample of these texts will show that the terms are used predominantly to reinforce the continuity between the early Church and the author's respective Christian institution.⁷⁰ In contrast, Donne does not seem to indicate that any Christian institution in early modern England is a full and faithful continuation of the early Church. Indeed, although critics referring to the above quotation from the 'Preface' of *Pseudo-Martyr* (sig. B3r) have tended to emphasise the relevance of the term 'Christian', it seems that the pertinent word in the sentence is 'newer'. That Donne 'dares not call his Religion by some *newer* name then Christian' suggests that he is looking backwards to the Christianity of the early Church, prior to schism, rather than

⁶⁹ 'Donne's religious world', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. by Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 65-82 (p. 65).

⁷⁰ For an important example of the terms being used interchangeably with the name of the author's respective institution in order to distinguish 'true *Christianity*' from 'an other kinde and forme of religion of [another author's] owne inuention', see John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happening in the Church*, 2nd edn (London, 1583; STC 11225), sig. 2v. This usage follows *OED*, 2a: 'Of things: Pertaining to Christ or his religion: of or belonging to Christianity'. Other examples will show that the terms are used in conversion literature to strategically minimise the sectarian differences between the reader and the writer in order to encourage conversion. In this sense, they indicate the 'whole body of Christians' or the 'Christian part of the world', a meaning already well attested by the fourteenth-century (*OED*, 'Christianity', 1; 'Christendom', 1.a.).

referring to any or all of the denominations that developed over time.⁷¹ This point is reinforced by Donne's propensity to return to the 'foundation' of Christianity throughout his works – to the 'vnity of the God-head, or the Trinity of the persons' that comprise the '*Elements* of the Christian Religion, of which it was fram'd and complexioned' (sig. F4v). To 'shake' this foundation, as opposed to shaking any of the contemporary practices associated with Catholicism or Protestantism, would be 'to ruine and demolish all' (sig. F4v).⁷²

A key source of misinterpretation for those who view Donne's use of 'Christian' as embracing all denominations in *Pseudo-Martyr* (with a sort of post-schism tolerance), is an extract from the 'Preface', in which the author discusses his 'easines, to affoord a sweete and gentle Interpretation, to all professors of Christian Religion, if they shake not the Foundation' (sig. B2r). What critics generally neglect to mention when referencing this passage is that Donne here provides an example of one of his 'humane infirmities', 'personall weakenesses' or 'faults' (sig. B2r). In other words, he actually admits that he should *not* be liberal-minded to 'all professors of the Christian Religion', but implies that it is more important to preserve the 'Foundation' of Christianity than it is to grapple with religious institutions, which are all much of a muchness. Donne elaborates on this point in a letter of 1608:

You know, I never fettered or imprisoned the word religion, not straightening it friarly, *Ad religiones factitias*, (as the Romans call well their orders of religion) not immuring it in a Rome, or a Wittenberg, or a Geneva; they are all virtual beams of one sun, and wheresoever they find clay hearts, they harden them, and moulder them into dust; and they entender and mollify waxen. They are not so contrary as the north and south poles; and that they are connatural pieces of one circle. Religion is

⁷¹ Cf. 'SermonLXVI', in John Donne, *LXXX sermons preached by that learned and reverend divine, Iohn Donne, Dr in Divinity, late Deane of the cathedrall church of S. Pauls London* (London, 1640; STC 7038), p. 668:

[...] to that Heaven which belongs to the Catholique Church, I shall never come, except I go by the way of the Catholique Church, by former Idea's, former examples, former patterns, To beleieve according to ancient beliefes, to pray according to ancient formes, to preach according to former meditations.

⁷² For Donne's reference to the Holy Trinity as the foundation of Christianity see the commentary to sermon 10 in *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne, vol. III: Sermons Preached at the Court of Charles I*, ed. by David Coldough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 403. Donne occasionally refers to Christ alone as the foundation.

Christianity, which being too spiritual to be seen by us, doth therefore take an apparent body of good life and works, so salvation requires an honest Christian.⁷³

The metaphor of the sun, a play on words with ‘Son’, is important here, for it indicates that ‘Christianity’ is not an umbrella term that encompasses all denominations or even one church in particular, but a word that signifies the source from which all of these ‘virtual beams’ proceed.⁷⁴ Thus, instead of distinguishing one religious institution from another in order to locate true religion, as early modern martyrologies were wont to do, Donne distinguishes the foundation of Christianity from its various derivatives. Throughout the preordination prose, he challenges the authority of all competing Christian doctrines and stresses that the splitting of the early Church arose from different interpretations of Christ’s teachings. For Donne, such doctrines are partial or distorted representations of original doctrine, and, in contrast to the foundation itself, are manmade and therefore fallible; as he would argue in later years, the names of churches should not be derived ‘from the Names of men, Papists, or Lutherans, or Calvinists’.⁷⁵ He was, in essence, ‘too well aware of the imperfections of all earthly churches to be willing to give to any an unqualified affirmation’.⁷⁶ This explains why *Pseudo-Martyr* attacks Jesuit ideas about martyrdom just as much as it ‘exhibits subtle misgivings about Protestant constructions and uses of martyrdom’,⁷⁷ and why *Biathanatos* ‘criticize[s] as much a Protestant as a Roman Catholic position’.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London, 1651; Wing D1864), pp. 26–31 (p. 28)

⁷⁴ Cf. *Satyre* 3, ll. 87–88, in which the sun/Son metaphor portrays religious truth as being too ‘dazzling’ not to be noticed, but simultaneously too ‘dazzling’ to be properly comprehended. A person may attempt to bring the truth into focus as the eye may endeavour to bring the sun into focus, but must accept the limitation of their ability to fully comprehend the ‘mysteries’ of God.

⁷⁵ Donne, *LXXX sermons*, p. 688.

⁷⁶ Roy W. Battenhouse, ‘The Grounds of Religious Toleration in the Thought of John Donne’, *Church History*, 11, no. 3 (September 1942), 217–48 (p. 220).

⁷⁷ Monta, p. 132.

⁷⁸ Rudick and Battin, p. xxv. John Klause further contends that Donne ‘spoke as though it were a mark of rational honesty to resist the allure of heroes or models’, and that in *Pseudo-Martyr* he writes against both Catholics and Protestants in order to suggest ‘that “Martyrologies” of the “Reformed Churches” might themselves need reform’, in ‘Hope’s Gambit: The Jesuitical, Protestant, Skeptical Origins of Donne’s Heroic Ideal’, *Studies in Philology*, 91, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 181–215 (pp. 184–86).

In associating true religion with the foundation of Christianity rather than with any particular institution, Donne destabilises a central aspect of the martyrial archetype constructed in early modern martyrologies.⁷⁹ He argues that the religious assurance that would drive a person to distinguish truth from heresy on the basis of disputed doctrines is arrogant in its disregard for the limitations of human knowledge. Since it is impossible to know whether one is judging another correctly, a man may not ‘be sure of his owne righteousness, that himselfe had such an assurance of righteousness in another man’ (*PM*, sig. R4r). By this logic, neither may a man persecute another, because it is ‘the nature of stiff wickedness to think that of others which themselves deserve[,] and it is all the comfort which the guilty have, not to find any innocent’ (*Biath.*, ‘Preface’),⁸⁰ nor may he exercise religious toleration, since it is a sin to be indifferent or compassionate towards a heretic.⁸¹ As Thomas Paine would put it almost two centuries later: ‘Toleration is not the opposite of Intolerance, but is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it’.⁸²

Rather than being certain and conclusive, religious doctrine is presented in Donne’s preordination prose as a matter to be discussed and debated. This idea is explicated in *Biathanatos* when Donne compares the multiplicity of opinions associated with the correct way to worship God with the multiplicity of meanings associated with the term ‘natural law’. Referencing the work of Georgius Acacius Enenkelius,⁸³ he writes that

It is natural, and binds all always, to know there is a God, if He be, must be worshipped, and after this, by likely consequence, that He must be

⁷⁹ In her chapter on suffering and the question of religious confidence in Donne’s works, Monta presents an opposing point of view, arguing that *Pseudo-Martyr* attempts to ‘formulate a moderate response to the powerful contemporary martyr-complex linking suffering with religious confidence’ (*Martyrdom and Literature*, p. 132). The present chapter agrees with Monta’s argument insofar as stating that suffering is associated with living martyrdom in Donne’s works, but departs from this argument on the question of religious confidence.

⁸⁰ This view echoes Luke 6. 27, in which Christ advises: ‘Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves’.

⁸¹ Shami discusses this point in relation to Donne’s sermons, in *Conformity in Crisis*, p. 270.

⁸² *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (London, 1791), p. 36.

⁸³ Acacius was an Austrian Baron who produced a translation of and commentary on Thucydides. Donne is here interested in the subject of Acacius’s study, Thucydides, who developed a concept of political realism based upon human emotion and behaviour rather than divine intervention. See Rudick and Battin, pp. 214-15.

worshipped in this or this manner. And so every sect will, a little corruptly and adulterately, call their discipline “natural law” and enjoin a necessary obedience to it.

(I.ii.2)

The only way to religious truth, *Biathanatos* argues, is ‘to debate and vex it’, and this responsibility lies mainly with ‘Contemplative, and bookish men’ who

must of necessity be more quarrellsome then others, because they contend not about matter of fact, nor can determine theyr controversies by any certayne witnesses, nor judges. But as long as they go towards Peace, that is Truth, it is no matter which way.

(‘Preface’)

Any constructive and well-informed argument that is driven by a desire to discover religious truth must be taken into account, even though it should never be considered conclusive; arguments may be judged as good or bad, but it is not within man’s jurisdiction to discern whether they are right or wrong. Hence, as it is famously stated in *Satyre III*, although a person must keep the truth that they have found, s/he must continue to ‘doubt wisely’ and ‘stand inquiring right’. To fail to do so is ‘To sleep’ and ‘to stray’ (ll. 78-79), and this is condemned in *Pseudo-Martyr* as ‘blinde and stupid obedience’ (sig. Dd1v). In extricating the martyr-figure from the entangled confines of religious institutions, Donne argues that every individual should be a religious institution unto her/himself.

Although *Pseudo-Martyr* receives little critical attention in its entirety, the autobiographical sections mentioned above have often been selected in order to substantiate larger theories about Donne’s politics and religion, even in studies that do not refer to the text in any other capacity. In treating these passages as though they stand apart from the text, critics have disregarded Donne’s caveat in the ‘Advertisement’ against taking material out of context. Immediately after making the oft-quoted declarations that he is a Christian and that he has

beene euer kept awake in a meditation of Martyrdome, by being deriued from such a stocke and race, as, I beleeeue, no family, (which is not of fame larger extent, and greater branches,) hath endured and suffered more in

their persons and fortunes, for obeying the Teachers of Romane Doctrine,
then it hath done[.]

(sig. ¶1r)

Donne writes, crucially, that he has entered into the debate over the oath of allegiance for ‘such reasons, as may arise to his knowledge, who shall be pleased to *read the whole worke*’ (sig. ¶1v, my emphasis). In reconstructing the lives of early modern figures from fragments of information, Andrew Hadfield argues, it is not surprising that ‘often a great deal is made of one or two facts, which, read in particular ways, determine how a whole personality—and more—might be seen in relationship to their works’. Hadfield goes on to clarify, however, that it is not impossible to write a history if a ‘plausible context’ is taken into account. ‘If we refuse to speculate’, he states, ‘we risk the naivety of scepticism’.⁸⁴ If *Pseudo-Martyr* is going to be used to discern Donne’s religion or his views on martyrdom, his comments in the prefatory sections need to be understood within the ‘plausible context’ of the text’s many internal and overarching arguments. Indeed, the main body of *Pseudo-Martyr* is the huge hill, cragged and steep, beneath the seat of Truth: the foundation of thought that provides a justification for the seemingly bold statements on its surface. In considering ‘the whole worke’, which also involves understanding *Pseudo-Martyr* as a part of Donne’s oeuvre, it becomes clear that Donne’s aim in discussing the oath of allegiance is not simply to defend one political policy at one particular moment in time. Rather, current affairs become a vehicle by which the author drives much larger arguments about the separation of the state and the church, the dangers of blind obedience and idolatry, and the best ways in which to defend the foundation of Christianity.

In particular, *Pseudo-Martyr* shows that whereas religious institutions are riddled with human error and misinterpretations, making it impossible to know which, if any, represents the true faith, the institution of the state, which does not seek to bind the conscience, provides the most reliable defence of true religion. The primary function of the state, the

⁸⁴ Edmund Spenser: *A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

text repeatedly argues, is to labour ‘watchfullie and zealouslie for the promo[v]ing of *Christs* glorie’ so that society may be conserved in peace and religion (sig. Gg4v). Should an individual threaten the state by not adhering to the law, it follows that this individual would also threaten the foundation of Christianity.⁸⁵ According to this argument, Catholics have a duty to take the oath of allegiance because all subjects are ‘equally endanger’d’ in the king’s dangers, and ‘since in providing for [his] Maiesties securitie, the Oath defends vs, it is reason, that wee defend it’ (sig. A2v). As Donne would say in later years, the ‘*Lawe* is my *Suretie* to the *State*, that I shall pay my Obedience, And the *Lawe* is the *States Suretie* to mee, that I shall enjoy my Protection’.⁸⁶

From this point of view, conformity removes the responsibility from the subject who may otherwise feel compelled to commit to a religious doctrine, and thus protects her or him from possibly binding their conscience to heretical principles, and gives them the time and space necessary to develop their conscience. A person that will reach ‘Truth’, as *Satyre III* states, ‘about must, and about go’ (l. 81). Unlike many early modern texts on martyrdom that emphasise the continuity of the early Church, Donne emphasises the continuity of secular authority. In Lander’s words, ‘Donne insists that ecclesiastical hierarchy is defectible, subject to contingencies of history, and at the same time mystifies secular authority as immutable and everlasting’.⁸⁷ Thus, Donne draws a clear line of separation between the state and the church. Rather than presenting them as rival authorities competing for the same position as the superior institution of the two, whereby the secular and the religious would become

⁸⁵ Sommerville demonstrates that this argument was being used by other absolutists such as Sir Thomas Wentworth who believed, in Sommerville’s words, that ‘Royal authority took precedence over the liberties of the subject, for unless protected by authority the liberties would dissolve’ (*Royalists & Patriots*, p. 129). The text of Wentworth’s 1628 speech can be found in Kenyon, p. 16. See also Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 135. Sommerville notes that others such as Henry Parker, however, were arguing that ‘in nature there is more favour due to the liberty of the subject, then to the Prerogative of the King, since the one is ordained onely for the preservation of the other’ (*Royalists & Patriots*, pp. 128-29).

⁸⁶ John Donne, *The first sermon preached to King Charles, at Saint Iames* (London, 1625; STC 7040), p. 37.

⁸⁷ p. 157.

diametrically opposed, he posits them as equal earthly authorities with separate functions.⁸⁸ Although he argues that salvation can be attained more safely through the state than through the church, since the former permits a doubting conscience, Donne is clear that no earthly authority should be obeyed blindly. He only writes to remind readers that ‘your Obedience here, may prepare your admission into the heauenly *Hierusalem*’ (sig. E2r). As he would state in his *Sermon upon the Anniversary of the Powder Treason*:

though you owe obedience to no power under heaven so as to decline you from the true God, and the fundamental things therefor, yet in these things which are in their nature but circumstantial, and may therefore according to times, and places, and persons, admit alteration, in those things, though they may be things appertaining to religion, submit yourselves to the King’s directions.⁸⁹

In arguing that religious institutions might lead a person into error, Donne’s statement in *Pseudo-Martyr* that he is a ‘Christian’ is not an ambiguous comment that has been embedded stealthily into the prefatory material: it is the introduction, the foundation, the climax, and the logical conclusion of an argument that runs the length of approximately four-hundred pages. In order to fully understand Donne’s position on true faith, it is essential to understand the argument unpinning this position: that it is in the secular institution of the state, rather than in the church, that one may find the safest way to salvation.

II

Before examining Donne’s use of the oath controversy as a vehicle for the argument that conformists are the true defenders of Christianity, we must first briefly set out the context of the controversy itself. Such a step is important in order to situate Donne’s intervention in the light of contemporary conflicts between those, particularly recusant Catholics, who saw the use of oaths by the state as a means of binding the conscience, and therefore considered matters of state and church to be inextricably bound, and those who took various alternative positions, ranging from firm advocacy of Protestant supremacy to those, like Donne, who

⁸⁸ Sommerville, ‘John Donne the Controversialist’, in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, p. 90.

⁸⁹ John Donne, *Fifty sermons* (London, 1649; Wing D1862), p. 407.

adopted a strongly statist line, but sought to disentangle statism and absolutism from the capacity to control the conscience of any woman or man. Donne's suspicion of all manmade institutions, including of the absolute state, which he supported, as open to error, meant that even if temporal authorities had the right to bind the body's bidding and exert powerful control over its subjects, such authorities could never bind the conscience. It was therefore possible to obey temporal authority absolutely, while still being able to harbour doubts and thus avoid the dangers of 'certaintie' and assurance. In advancing such an argument, Donne was also quite clearly making an argument that ran against the grain of Protestant and Catholic martyrologies, which argued for the continued power and necessity of witnessing for one's beliefs. Instead, Donne sought to preserve the capacity of a doubting conscience and consequently circumscribe the grounds by which one might be able to claim genuine martyrdom – while simultaneously challenging the recourse to one of the ways that the state could be imperilled in its defence of true, Christian religion.

The dichotomy between true religion and heresy in early modern narratives on martyrdom is represented by the persecuted individual and the persecutory state, respectively. In order for the martyr to be presented as a defender of the truth faith, the state must necessarily be presented as an institution that persecutes that true faith, and which consequently combines religious and secular matters.⁹⁰ A prominent example of this literary tradition occurs in accounts of the case of Sir Thomas More, a Catholic who was executed as a traitor in 1535 for denying the royal supremacy of Henry VIII. In many contemporary Catholic narratives of this execution, More is venerated as a martyr or saint-like figure (even though he was not officially canonised until 1935).⁹¹ More's death, as well as the deaths of

⁹⁰ For the role played by persecution in the conceptualisation of the martyr-figure, see Covington, pp. 1-26.

⁹¹ For an excellent overview of the ways in which More's sixteenth-century biographers, Nicholas Harnpsfield, William Roper, Thomas Stapleton, and the anonymous Ro:Ba, presented More as a martyr, often drawing a distinction between More and St Thomas of Canterbury, see Lines, at length. See also, Dillon, pp. 64-71. For further discussion on More's literary representation, particularly with regards to the ways in which he was portrayed on the early modern stage and mocked in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, see Monta, pp. 160-172.

others who had been executed by Henry under the Treason Act, writes Anne Dillon, ‘had established a new cause of martyrdom, one that had arisen in consequence of Henry’s Act of Supremacy’: death in defence of the unity of the church and the pope’s authority. In specifically targeting the pope’s powers to depose, excommunicate monarchs, and provide absolution for taking the oath, the Jacobean oath of allegiance went further than both the Henrician oath of supremacy and the Elizabethan Settlement. It was due to this clause, as J. P. Sommerville notes, that many English Catholics accepted the consequences for refusing the oath, the penalty for a second refusal being *praemunire*, leading, for some, to a traitor’s death.⁹²

In order to be perceived as advancing a fair line of argument, it was important that any given party in the debate constructed a formula of reasoning that ostensibly promoted the separation of the state and the church in the face of an opponent who was doing the opposite. Thus, while most Catholic recusants presented Elizabethan and Jacobean treason statutes as being based on religion, and as a departure from established legal norms, conformists were arguing that it was not the state, but rather those committing treason and then calling themselves martyrs, who were conflating temporal and spiritual matters. Indeed, just as Elizabeth I had claimed that she did not wish to open windows into men’s souls, thus presenting uniformity as an outward display of obedience to the state rather than a matter touching the conscience,⁹³ so James attempted to reassure subjects in his *Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance* that his intention was ‘not to intrap nor inthrall [the Catholics’] consciences’, and

⁹² *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 184. It is worth stipulating that not all Catholics adopted this view, as is clear from the various defences of limited or partial conformity produced. This idea shall be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹³ During her reign, Elizabeth I proclaimed that ‘There cannot be two religions in one State’. On 5 November 1602 Elizabeth issued a royal proclamation declaring that no religion other than the established religion would be tolerated. The proclamation ordered that all Jesuits and secular priests leave England, although some of the secular clergy claimed that it did make concessions to them. The standard of conformity defined by statute was, in fact, very low, which made it possible for those who were not in sympathy with Protestant-driven reform to comply sufficiently to avoid the penalties in statute. For further discussion, see Jonathan Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Arnold Pritchard, *Catholic Loyalty in Elizabethan England* (London: Scholar Press, 1979); Covington, p. 3. Elizabeth’s quotation is taken from Joseph Leder, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1960), II, p. 378.

that taking the oath was solely a case of civil obedience to separate radicals from loyalists.⁹⁴ In this text, James denigrates More's refusal of the Henrician oath as 'a very fleshly cause of martyrdom', and by suggesting that More's actions were devoid of spirituality he attempted 'to shatter the More legend and disperse the aura of sanctity it emitted'.⁹⁵ Since it was considered a grievous sin for the government to force a person to swear to an oath against their conscience, the best way for the state to 'diffuse the issue was to claim that Catholics simply did not face crises of conscience at all but, rather, had a choice between obeying or breaking the law'.⁹⁶

Throughout his reign, James was concerned with the idea of uniformity, often associating himself with the Hebrew monarch King Solomon, known also as the 'Prince of Peace'. Having compared Elizabeth's defeat of the Armada to King David's victory over the Philistines, James saw it as his destiny to restore England to a peaceable state.⁹⁷ His association with Solomon was public knowledge, a fact evident in John King's 1606 sermon that describes James as 'our *Salomon*' 'who after the *Prince of our peace*, hath [...] set peace within the borders of his owne kingdoms and of nations about us'.⁹⁸ With an emphasis on being the first monarch to unite England and Scotland, James believed that he too was destined to bring unity and peace, rebuild the Temple and represent England as the true Christian Israel.⁹⁹ In fact, in seeking to rebuild Solomon's Temple, James was thinking literally as well as metaphorically, as is evident from the chapel he had built at Stirling Castle in 1594, which was 'deliberately modelled on the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem'.¹⁰⁰ After the

⁹⁴ James VI&I, *An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance* (London, 1609), p. 22.

⁹⁵ *Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance*, p. 103; Annabel Patterson, *Reading between the Lines* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 187, respectively.

⁹⁶ Jonathan Wright, 'The World's Worst Worm: Conscience and Conformity during the English Reformation', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 30, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 113-33 (pp. 129-30).

⁹⁷ Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 37.

⁹⁸ Richard Martin quoted in Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, p. 44.

⁹⁹ Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, pp. 32-45.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Campbell and Aonghus MacKednie, 'The "Great Temple of Solomon" at Stirling Castle', *Architectural History*, 54 (2011), 91-118 (p. 91). See also Aonghus MacKednie, 'James VI's Architects and Their Architecture', in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. by Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000),

Reformation, Achsah Guibbory argues, England's monarch required legitimization as the governor of the English Church, and the Hebrew Bible proved invaluable for this purpose: James 'looked to biblical Israel to support his divine right theory of kingship' and 'to place England's king beyond the reach of the Pope and above the power of Parliament and the law'.¹⁰¹ Considering the emphasis in the Hebrew Bible on taking an active stance against idolatry, the king's description of England as 'this Kingdome and Monarchie among the Iewes' also indicates the necessity of religious coercion in order to eradicate heresy.¹⁰² As such, James fits the model of an early modern persecutor set out by John Coffey in his *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689*.¹⁰³ Such individuals (who would not have considered themselves persecutors), Coffey argues, believed that religious coercion was a 'legitimate weapon in the armoury of the Christian church' and that through 'godly princes, the Lord was extending his rule'.¹⁰⁴

pp. 134-69. Although it was commonplace for rulers to imitate Solomon's Temple, James was constantly seeking ways to reinforce his association with the Hebrew monarch.

It should be noted, however, that many believed that '[b]uilding the nation on an Israelite foundation reversed Paul's efforts to detach the 'true' Christian Israel from both genealogy and nation' (Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, pp. 82; 74). Indeed, it was important for many that a Christian monarch was nothing like Solomon, for he and his Temple were often associated with idolatry. A source of this accusation was 1 Kings 11. 7-8, which portrays Solomon as being tempted by his wives' false gods, and as building a worship site east of Jerusalem to idolise the Moabite god Chemosh and the Ammonite god Molech; the latter of these gods, being associated with the propitiatory sacrifice of children by parents, could be symbolic for Catholic subjects who felt that they were being sacrificed to false gods. Even according to the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic tradition, Guibbory explains, the 'destruction of Solomon's Temple was the result of Israel's idolatry' (*Christian Identity*, p. 82). Catholics such as Sanders had utilised this criticism by presenting Henry VIII as a Solomon-figure, whose wives, particularly Anne Boleyn, could be compared to the Hebrew monarch's foreign wives in 1 Kings 11. 1. On this point, see Highley, p.157. As a self-styled Solomon, James was stepping into a ready-made Catholic mould of idolatry and heresy.

¹⁰¹ Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, pp. 23-34.

¹⁰² Quoted in Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, p. 35; James I, *The Works of the Most High and Mightie Prince, James* (London, 1616), pp. 151, 167. For examples from the Hebrew Bible, see Deuteronomy 7. 1-5, a passage that forbids intermarriage in order to prevent idolatry: when encountering those with different religious beliefs, the Jewish people are told to 'smite them, and utterly destroy them' as well as 'destroy their alters, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire'. It is further stated in Deuteronomy 7. 10 that God Himself is a persecutor who 'will not be slack to him that hateth him' but will instead 'repay him to his face'. The responsibility of the Israelites to take an active role in eradicating heresy is indicated by both the meaning of the Hebrew word יִשְׂרָאֵל [Israel], 'he that striveth with God', and in what can be considered the central prayer of Judaism the Shema Yisrael (Deuteronomy 6. 4-9), which proclaims the oneness of God and warns against idolatry.

¹⁰³ (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 21-46.

¹⁰⁴ Coffey, p. 31. During the fourth-century, Christianity had become a persecuting religion with numerous laws passed against pagans and heretics. Many had feared that religious toleration could lead to a heretical society that was based on diversity and schism instead of true religion. From James's perspective, he was not a persecutor but a defender of the true faith (Coffey, p. 22). On the persecution of the early church, see also W.

In his 1598 treatise on kingship *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, James explores ‘the mutuall dutie betwixt a free king, and his natural subjectes’ and explains that unity is ‘the perfection of al things’.¹⁰⁵ The oath of allegiance, as a mode of uniformity, was a means by which James sought to prevent England from creeping to corruption. As such, the king put forward the idea that, ‘[a]s the kindly father ought to foresee all inconvenients & dangers that may aryse towards his children [...]: So ought the King towards his people’.¹⁰⁶ The monarch’s actions, working in the people’s best interest, are preventative, the point being that s/he can anticipate and subdue dangers that the people may not be able to perceive or understand, which explains why the king should be obeyed despite personal thoughts and feelings. James’s description of himself as a ‘kindly father’ draws attention to the idea that, in early Stuart England, patriarchal arguments commonly formed part of the basis of absolutist thinking (even if not all absolutists were patriarchalists).¹⁰⁷ Sommerville notes that the ‘purpose of comparing or equating royal and paternal power was to suggest that kings do not get their authority from their subjects’ and so their power could not be limited.¹⁰⁸

The centrality of this idea in early Stuart England is demonstrated by its emergence in a range of texts, both fictional and non-fictional, with Shakespeare’s 1611 play *The Tempest* providing a popular example.¹⁰⁹ During the course of the play, Prospero, the right Duke of

H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ *True Lawe*, sig. B1r. Condren describes this text as a sort of elaboration of the absolutist theory of kingship: ‘It was not an absolutist theory of sovereignty per se, but it was uncompromising’ (Condren, pp. 276-77). Sommerville argues that it ‘was a truism of early Stuart political thinking that disunity weakened the state’. Of course, unity and disunity were ideological constructions, the term ‘disunity’ being used to give a negative connotation to the concept of diversity and the term ‘unity’ being used to give a positive connotation to the concept of coercion. As much as James endorsed the idea of ‘unity’, he relied on the threat of disunity to necessitate religious coercion (*Royalists & Patriots*, pp. 130-31). Further, James’s association with Solomon posed a problem for some Catholics because, unlike the New Testament, which presents the idea that Christians living under a monarch have a ‘double range of duties’ being obligated to ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’ (Matthew 22. 21), the Hebrew Bible combines church and state in the figure of the monarch (Leder, p. 21).

¹⁰⁶ *Trew Lawe of Free Monarchies* (Edinburgh, 1598), sig. B4v.

¹⁰⁷ Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ Johann Sommerville, ‘Literature and national identity’, in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Lowenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 457-86 (p. 471).

¹⁰⁹ That Shakespeare’s Jacobean plays have a knack for reflecting and exploring contemporary political anxieties, particularly with regards to the ideas of sovereignty and oath-taking, is argued persuasively in Hadfield, ‘Bad

Milan, does not always make his intentions explicit, and the ambiguity of his actions incites some of the other characters to question his rulership. In 1.2, for example, Prospero pretends to believe that Ferdinand is a traitor and declares an appropriate punishment (ll. 461-62). Miranda appeals this sentence believing her father to be both mistaken and unjust, and then rebels against him in 3.1. The lovers' knowledge, however, is exceeded by that of Prospero. In an aside to the audience the right Duke reveals his role as puppet-master:

They are both in either's powers, but this swift business
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning
Make the prize light.
(1.2.451-53)

Prospero foresees and prevents the potential danger of a love lightly won, and it is actually the limited understanding of the lovers that enables his plan's success as they strive to overcome the obstacles he presents. In the final scene of the play, Ferdinand sums up the idea of a ruler whose merciful actions might appear tyrannical from the limited perspective of a subject:

Though the seas threaten, they are merciful.
I have cursed them without cause.
(5.1.178-179)

Akin to James's self-presentation, Prospero's authority as a father and a ruler are intertwined. In this way, the play reflects the common idea during the period that rebellion against a father-figure within the domestic sphere was often considered as analogous to rebellion against a monarch, and could be defined as petty treason.¹¹⁰ Considering the sovereign's

faith', 1-7; and Melissa, E. Sanchez, 'Seduction and Service in "The Tempest"', *Studies in Philology*, 105, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 50-82. For a thorough account of the ways in which Shakespeare represents the question of the succession and the legitimacy of the monarch, see Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004).

¹¹⁰ Frances E. Dolan, 'The Subordinate(s) Plot: Petty Treason and the Forms of Domestic Rebellion', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 317-40 (p. 317). Dolan notes, for instance, that English statutes 'constructed a wife's murder of her husband or a servant's murder of his master as a kind of treason' because such acts 'challenged patriarchal, hierarchal social order'; the killing of a wife by a husband, however, was only considered as murder since no obedience was due to the victim (p. 317). The severity of this domestic threat is reflected in the real life trial and execution of Margaret Clitherow—one of only three Catholic English women to be martyred for her religion between the Reformation and the Civil War—whose outward displays of religious independence from her husband exposed her to the charge of open defiance of patriarchal authority *in toto* (Lake and Questier, 'Margaret Clitherow', pp. 86, 43-54).

power to prevent danger, it is important that ‘however much Prospero’s power is questioned and qualified’ in *The Tempest*, it is only in the play’s ‘representation of the supernaturally powerful master who decisively subordinates the plot of his rebellious servant [Caliban] that the story of attempted petty treason can end well for anyone, master or subordinate’.¹¹¹

The Tempest reflects the anxiety, following the Gunpowder Plot, that measures needed to be enforced to prevent dissidents from rising in power and destabilising the monarchy. Based on the concept of absolute sovereignty, which is often thought to have been developed by Jean Bodin in France during the latter half of the sixteenth-century, the 1606 oath of allegiance presented James as a supreme authority with no human superior or equal, and thus contributed to ‘the ensuing debate as an articulation of [James’s] absolutist ideology’.¹¹² According to Bodin, the king is only bound by the law so long as he deems the law just and beneficial to the community; he obeys the law at his discretion. It holds then that a king who *is* bound by human law acknowledges a superior and cannot, therefore, be considered an absolute monarch, if a monarch at all.¹¹³ A limited authority, many argued, was subject to the power held by the people and could be resisted and deposed.¹¹⁴ Thus, to allow subjects the right to resist, as far as Bodin was concerned, was to encourage them to rebel.¹¹⁵

In making a case for the rise of absolutism in early modern England, Sommerville argues that there was a dichotomy between absolutism and constitutionalism, which created disagreements over a subject’s liberty and a monarch’s power that eventually led to the Civil War. On this central point in early modern political theory, Sommerville negates the argument put forward by revisionist historians, particularly Glenn Burgess, that absolutism was practically non-existent in the years leading up to the war and that virtually everybody

¹¹¹ Dolan, 319.

¹¹² Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the rise of absolutist theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 51. For James’s intention to use the oath of allegiance to bolster his absolutist ideology, see Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 109; and Lemon, p. 109.

¹¹³ Franklin, p. 55.

¹¹⁴ Franklin, p. 51.

¹¹⁵ Franklin, p. 51.

agreed that England was a limited monarchy.¹¹⁶ Part of this debate is determined by differing definitions of the term absolutism (specifically, whether or not English thought was in line with European discussions), and part of it seems to be determined by the primary sources selected by each historian. With regards to the latter, it is interesting to note that while Burgess does not mention Donne at all, Sommerville has produced some of the best work on *Pseudo-Martyr* to date, and Donne's text, which Sommerville aligns with the works of other defenders of the oath including Lancelot Andrewes, Thomas Morton, William Barlow, and King James, features strongly in his reconstruction of early modern political thought.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Burgess's thesis that the conflict in early Stuart England between absolutism and constitutionalism is nothing but a myth that has been imposed, anachronistically, by historians, finds a serious contender in *Pseudo-Martyr*, which not only refers explicitly to Bodin and engages actively in European debates, but which is actually founded on the conflict between those who believe that the king's jurisdiction should be limited and those who do not. Furthermore, in reading some of Donne's better-known works alongside *Pseudo-Martyr*, it becomes apparent that ideas of absolutism pervade his oeuvre – as we shall aim to demonstrate in the next and final section.

But first, a caveat: although it is intriguing to consider Donne in his capacity as a thinker and his works as being instrumental to the rising tension that led, eventually, to the Civil War, I do not pretend, in arguing for Donne's absolutism, to be making any wider historical claims. For instance, Burgess does not deny the existence of all absolutist thought in England pre-Civil War, and his argument that such thought was unfamiliar in England might explain why *Pseudo-Martyr* received little attention from contemporary polemicists.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ For the key texts in this debate, see Burgess, at length; Johann P. Sommerville, 'English and European Political Ideas in the Early Seventeenth Century: Revisionism and the Case of Absolutism', *Journal of British Studies*, 35, no. 2 (Apr., 1996), 168-94.

¹¹⁷ See, in particular, Sommerville, 'John Donne the Controversialist', in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough pp. 73-95.

¹¹⁸ R. C. Bald refers to a couple of responses to *Pseudo-Martyr*, the first being Fitzherbert who 'convicts Donne of over-ingenuity' and the second being Edward Coffin who, in 1619, alluded to *Pseudo-Martyr* as 'a mere bundle of rotten rags ill fauouredly bound together', in *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 225-26.

If this is the case, then *Pseudo-Martyr* would serve to highlight Burgess's argument, while putting pressure on Sommerville's. Yet, there are many other possible explanations for *Pseudo-Martyr*'s presumably limited reception, these being: that Donne was a relatively junior member of the king's team, and so his works were bound to attract less attention than those produced by more senior figures such as Andrewes, Barlow and Morton;¹¹⁹ that the text was not officially commissioned, if at all, and does not conform to the standard conventions of either a pamphlet or a tract; that Donne's argument may have been considered by most to be too obscure to be comprehensible; and that Robert Persons, probably the adversary that Donne had in mind, died during the same year that *Pseudo-Martyr* was printed (1610). Although the lack of any substantial response to the text is interesting, since the eighty-two surviving copies of *Pseudo-Martyr* suggest the probability of a large first edition,¹²⁰ it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the implications of *Pseudo-Martyr*'s reception. For now, we shall return to the task at hand which is to examine Donne's use of the oath controversy to advance his argument for conformity.

III

Donne's 1610 defence of the oath of allegiance has often been read as a work that either endorses the pretence of outward conformity or is, in itself, an act of pretended conformity. Olga Valbuena states, for example, that '*Pseudo-Martyr* betrays the conviction that, poised between the two indeterminate circumstances of God's remoteness and the political vagaries of the outward visible church, it is preferable to re-clothe or change one's outward habit to fit the times than to perish for a conviction'.¹²¹ And while David Norbrook and Kate Gartner Frost argue that Donne produced *Pseudo-martyr* in an attempt to gain royal favour, Susannah Brietz Monta believes that the author's 'decision to avoid literal suffering need not be seen as that of an apostate or blasphemer, but rather of one who decided to survive the English

¹¹⁹ Sommerville, 'John Donne the Controversialist', in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, p. 94.

¹²⁰ Raspa, p. li.

¹²¹ Valbuena, 'Casuistry', 51.

persecution in other ways'.¹²² These representations of Donne's defence of the oath as an act of pusillanimity, ambition or survival, suggest that his support of the state is disingenuous in one way or another, and imply that the writing of *Pseudo-Martyr* was a morally compromising act of obedience to the king for selfish ends. Despite the view that, as Glenn Burgess states, people in seventeenth-century England 'could not speak freely without fear of punishment for sedition or treason or whatever', 'the lack of public criticism of "approved" beliefs should not be taken to imply universal assent to them',¹²³ this does not mean that all who did support the 'approved' beliefs were being insincere.¹²⁴ Contrary to Valbuena's evaluation of *Pseudo-Martyr* as implying 'political vagaries' and 'God's remoteness', Donne describes the oath as a 'Princes mercie' and as one of 'those ouertures of escape, which God presents' (sigs. Hh2r-Hh2v). The main function of the state, the text argues, is to conserve society in peace and in religion (sig. Gg4v).

Although Donne acknowledges the dilemma facing Catholics, he agrees with James that it is not for the state to exercise religious toleration. Arguing that subjects need to be tolerant of the state that protects them despite their inner beliefs, *Pseudo-Martyr* contends that religious views should not affect conformity since loyalty to the king—a temporal matter—does not necessitate an indefinite and logically consequent binding of the conscience. Highlighting the separation between the state and the conscience, he writes, 'If your owne iust and due preservation, worke nothing vpon you, yet haue some pitie and compassion towards your Countrey' (sig. E1r). Since Christianity is 'neither impaired in the extent, nor

¹²² Monta, p. 132. For a similar view to Monta's, see Meg Lota Brown, *Donne and the Politics of Conscience in Early Modern England* (Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill), p. 12, in which it is argued that Donne's politics and support of the king are not dear or consistent; and Raspa, p. xliii. Like Monta, Raspa argues that '*Pseudo-Martyr* became Donne's penultimate argument about how he could be conveniently English and peacefully Christian'. For further reading on Donne's ambition see Arthur Marotti, 'Donne as Social Exile and Jacobean Courtier: The Devotional Verse and Prose of the Secular Man', in *Critical Essays on John Donne*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), pp. 77-101.

¹²³ pp. 2-3.

¹²⁴ For an excellent summary, and one which provides a convincing counter-argument to those who claim that Donne was either an apostate or an opponent of royal absolutism, see Sommerville, 'John Donne the Controversialist', in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, pp. 73-95.

corrupted in the puritie, by any thing proposed in the Oath' (sig. Hh1r), a refusal to obey the law has nothing to do with upholding religious beliefs and everything to do with undermining the king's authority. Furthermore, he states in the 'Epistle Dedicatorie' that although the 'Oath must worke vpon vs all', the difference between Protestants and Catholics is that the former need to testify an allegiance 'to' the oath, while the latter need only testify an allegiance 'by' it (sig. A2v). Such a view challenged the popular notion in early modern England that an 'oath was the measure of the conscience' and hence a true reflection on the interiority of the subject.¹²⁵ For Donne, an oath acted as a mode of uniformity to prevent the conscience from being measured.

In establishing the duty of a subject to take the Jacobean oath, Donne examines the '*Obedience due to Princes*' that is based on a 'naturall light and reason, which acknowledges a *necessity* of a *Superiour*, that we may enioy *peace*, and *worshippe God*' (sigs. Cc3v-Cc4r). The idea that the necessity of government arose out of the law of nature was widely accepted during the period.¹²⁶ Nations require a 'forme of Government', Donne states, in order to achieve '*Peaceable* and *religious* Tranquility' and so once they 'concurr in the desire of such a *King*, they cannot contract, nor limitte his power' (sigs. Cc4r-Cc4v). Donne here addresses a common point put forward by Catholic controversialists, who made a claim for the pope's deposing power by arguing, as Phebe Jensen puts it, 'that the final authority for temporal power resided in "the people."' ¹²⁷ Jensen, however, stops short of calling *Pseudo-Martyr* an absolutist text, arguing instead that this is 'only a partially obedience text, and one which suggests reservations toward the secular authority it supposedly defends'.¹²⁸ This argument is predicated on Donne's rejection of patriarchalism, as well as the premise that, by 'insisting

¹²⁵ John Spurr, "'The Strongest Bond of Conscience': Oaths and the Limits of Tolerance in Early Modern England", in *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, ed. by Harold Braun and Edward Vallance (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 151-65 (p. 159). For a thorough history of the development of the oath throughout history, see Helen Silving, 'The Oath: I', *Yale Law Journal*, 68, no. 7 (1959), 1329-90; 'The Oath: II', *Yale Law Journal*, 68, no. 8 (1959), 1527-77.

¹²⁶ Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ p. 49.

¹²⁸ pp. 47-48.

on the shared use of the word “monarchy”, indistinguishable in the two spheres, temporal and spiritual, Donne’s attack on blind obedience extends to both of these spheres.¹²⁹ With regards to the former, Donne does indeed reject patriarchalism,¹³⁰ but this does not necessarily mean that the text is only ‘partially obedient’ as the theory is not synonymous with absolutism; patriarchalism, like the theory of the ‘Divine Right of Kings’, is a defence of absolutism.¹³¹ The two main components of absolutist theory are essentially that the monarch derives their power immediately from God and that this authority therefore cannot be limited. With regards to the latter, it should be noted, as Sommerville explains, that the ‘notion that the king was accountable only to God did not [...] imply that his powers were wholly unlimited, for like everyone else he was subject to divine law’, and so if ‘a royal command conflicted with God’s law, it would be necessary to obey the superior authority of God, and, in so doing, to disobey his deputy the king’.¹³² Those holding the following views, Sommerville clarifies, were indeed ‘proponents of the doctrine of divine right’:

(1) God initially granted power to a sovereign people, and they then transferred this divine power to a king on conditions defined by contract, reserving to themselves the right to resist, depose and execute him if he broke the contract; the king’s power is divine in origin, but limited by contract; (2) God granted power *directly* and *immediately* to the king and not to the people, so he is accountable only to God, must always be obeyed except when his commands are contrary to God’s, and may not be actively resisted; his power is *not* limited by contract. [...] A third view was that even if kings originally got power from god alone, they came in time to be limited by the customary law of the land [...].¹³³

Donne’s theory fits the second definition.¹³⁴ Those who argue against Donne’s absolutism often discount the qualification, stipulated above, that the king ‘must always be obeyed

¹²⁹ Jensen, pp. 55-56.

¹³⁰ Unlike James who finds the origin of monarchy in 1 Samuel in which the Israelites willingly trade liberty for protection, Donne contends that ‘it is a doudie and muddie search to offer to trace to the first roote of Jurisdiction, since it grows not in man’ (*PM*, sigs. Cc3r-Cc3v). James discusses the reciprocal duties between ruler and subject in his *True Lane*. For an interesting discussion on the topic, see Sanchez, p. 54.

¹³¹ Sommerville equates the theory of the Divine Right of Kings with absolutism, though it should be noted that not all historians agree on this point.

¹³² *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 37.

¹³³ *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 11, n. 1.

¹³⁴ Shami has argued the same in relation to Donne’s sermons, in *Conformity in Crisis*, p. 11. It is worth noting that Donne cites Bodin in *Biathanatos*, showing that he was familiar with these works.

except when his commands are contrary to God's'. Condren discusses the way in which the *persona* of the monarch was separate from the person of the monarch, but mainly uses this distinction to show that those writing against the monarch said he was no longer a *persona* but a tyrant.

Critics either miss or disregard a crucial element of Donne's works: his insistence on differentiating between obedience and idolatry.¹³⁵ Unlike James, who stated famously in his 1609 address to Parliament that 'Kings are not onely GODS Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon GODS throne, but even by GOD himself they are called Gods',¹³⁶ Donne portrays the king as God's conduit. 'Kings', he says, 'cannot animate and informe their Subiects as the soule doth the body', but rather rule subjects in the same way that reason rules the appetite:

To that forme of Gouvernement therof for which rectified reason, which is Nature, common to all wise men, dooth iustly chuse, as aptest to worke their end, God instils such a power as we wish to be in that person, and which wee beleeeue to be infused by him, and therefore obey it as a beame deriued from him, without hauing departed with any thing from our selues.

(sig. Cc3v)

The idea of the king's power as a 'beame' derived from God echoes Donne's 1609 letter in which he describes all Christian churches as 'virtual beams of one sun'. As an earthly authority, it is not the king's person that should be obeyed, but rather his office and the power instilled in him by God. In a sermon later on, Donne would comment that 'Princes are Gods Trumpet, and the Church is Gods Organ, but Christ Jesus is his voyce'.¹³⁷ Although the king should not be blindly obeyed to the point that the conscience becomes complacent, it still remains important that once the people 'concurr in the desire of such a *King*, they cannot contract, nor limitte his power' (sigs. Cc4r-Cc4v). As we have stated above, Donne

¹³⁵ Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), argues, for instance, that in his 'controversial prose' Donne 'conflates spiritual and secular monarchical authority, God and King'; 'whatever his spiritual needs', Marotti writes, 'as an importunate courtly suitor Donne wanted James's favour to make him prosper' (p. 250).

¹³⁶ James VI&I, *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince*, p. 529.

¹³⁷ Donne, *LXXX sermons*, p. 465.

argues that men do not have the jurisdiction to exercise religious persecution or toleration; only monarchs are endowed with the responsibility of making such decisions. It is therefore necessary to tolerate their 'persecutions' which involve 'worldly Crosses and Tribulations', such as the Jacobean oath of allegiance.¹³⁸ These 'persecutions', Donne writes, 'are not onely part of the Martyrdome, but they are part of the reward', and so while 'Christ promises a reward' he does not 'take away the persecution' but mingles and compounds persecution and reward so that they become 'both of one taste' and 'nourish our spirituall growth' (sigs. F2r-F2v).

The idea that it is the king's persona rather than person that should be obeyed is made explicit in a sermon that Donne preached on the death of King James on 26 April 1625 entitled 'Behold king Solomon', in which he states that king is 'now layd lower by death then any of us'.¹³⁹ Donne's main point in this sermon is that 'our peace is made in, and by Christ Jesus' and not by an earthly king.¹⁴⁰ Jennifer Woodward rightly comments that in this sermon Donne uses 'the corpse of the King as a paradigm of mortality to set against the immortality of Christ, signified textually in the name and person of Solomon'. Woodward goes on to compare Donne's sermon to that of John Williams (1585-1650) entitled *Great Britain's Solomon*, in which James is celebrated as a reincarnation of the Hebrew king, and finds that the 'polarity of Solomon and the King in Donne's argument contrasts with William's technique of fashioning James as an image of Solomon'.¹⁴¹ This image-making, which distorts the line between obedience and idolatry, was precisely the type of misinterpretation of absolute authority that Donne sought to prevent. Unlike James who viewed himself as one who would rebuild Solomon's Temple, Donne therefore imagines Christianity as a building

¹³⁸ Cf. 'The Cross', in which Donne uses a play on words as he intermingles images of 'worldly Crosses' and the 'signe of the Crosse'.

¹³⁹ Donne, *Fifty sermons*, p. 301.

¹⁴⁰ Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, p. 39.

¹⁴¹ *The Theatre of Death: the ritual management of royal funerals in Renaissance England, 1570-1625* (New York: Boydell Press, 1997), p. 176.

structure that can be likened to the Temple, and one which is supported rather than created by the king:

For as when the rooffe of the Temple rent asunder, not long after followed the ruine of the foundation it selfe: So if these two principall beames and Toppe-rafters, the Prince and the Priest, rent asunder, the whole frame and Foundation of Christian Religion will be shaken.

(sig. B2v)

Once again, the ‘beames’ metaphor is used to draw a distinction between manmade institutions and the foundation of Christianity. For stability, the foundation of Christianity relies on both the king, who ‘by his lawes keepes vs in the way to heauen’, and the priest, whose role it is to ‘looke to, and examine our soules’ (sig. G3r). The body and the soul, symbolised by the state and the church, respectively, work together to achieve the same end. Donne suggests that should there be any conflict between these two earthly authorities, ‘the whole frame and Foundation of Christian Religion will be shaken’; a disaster that would be comparable to the destruction of the ‘rooffe of the Temple’ in 510 BC, which led to the ‘ruine of the foundation it selfe’ (sig. B2v).¹⁴² The building metaphor was a commonplace of Jacobean religious polemic; yet, while some writers used it to argue that the foundation of the Church of Rome could not bear the weight of the Church’s errors, Donne here highlights the necessity of unity among the different elements – the state, the church and the foundation itself.¹⁴³

The metaphor occurs again in Donne’s final sermon, ‘Deaths Duell, or, A Consolation to the Soule, Against the Dying Life, And Living Death of the Body’:

Buildings stand by the benefit of their foundations that sustain and support them, and of their buttresses that comprehend and embrace them, and of their contignations that knit and unite them. The foundations suffer them not to sink, the buttresses suffer them not to swerve, and the contignation and knitting suffers them not to cleave. The body of our building is in the former part of this verse. It is this: *He that is our God is the*

¹⁴² The metaphor is based on the architecture of early buildings which did not have deep foundations and so relied on the roof for support.

¹⁴³ Alison Shell and Arnold Hunt, ‘Donne’s religious world’, in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. by Guibbory, pp. 75–76.

God of salvation; ad salutes, of salvations in the plural, so it is in the original; the God that gives us spiritual and temporal salvation too.¹⁴⁴

The idea that salvation exists in the plural, presents both ‘spiritual’ and ‘temporal’ matters as equally important. Whilst the ‘buttresses’ and ‘contignations’ rely on the ‘foundation’ for support, offering such support is the very purpose of this foundation. The function of each element can therefore only be fully understood within a context of co-dependency. Contrary to Valbuena’s argument that, according to Donne, ‘taking the oath would cause a figurative “divorce” of the Catholic subject’s “body” and “Soul,”’ but that it would ‘nonetheless prevent the subject’s execution’ (which would cause an actual divorce of body and soul), Donne states that it ‘is intire man that God hath care of, and not the soule alone’ and ‘therefore his first worke was the body, and the last worke shall bee the glorification thereof’ (sig. G3r).¹⁴⁵ Taking the oath, from this point of view, is not merely about avoiding execution – it is about ensuring salvation. While Donne argues that ‘if we distinguish not between’ the powers, ‘there can bee no Church; as there could be no body of a man, if it were all eye’, meaning that the body only works because it is made up of different parts which perform different functions, the emphasis remains on the ‘whole’ (sig. B2v). The pun on ‘eye’ draws attention to the personal pronoun indicating that a man could not exist if he were not a part of a community. The rival powers of the king and the pope are not in conflict because they are ‘so distinct as our *Body* and *Soule*: and though our Soule can contemplate God of herself, yet she can produce no exterior act without the body’.

Thus, although, as Tom Cain states, Donne’s purpose in *Pseudo-Martyr* is ‘to emphasize the autonomy of the king in relation to the Papacy’ and ‘emphasize the king’s “absolute” power’,¹⁴⁶ Donne stipulates that ‘neither power alone could worke, nor they

¹⁴⁴ *Deaths duell, or, A consolation to the soule, against the dying life, and lining death of the body* (London, 1632; STC 7031), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁵ Valbuena’s statement is taken from *Subjects to the King’s Divorce: Equivocation, Infidelity, and Resistance in Early Modern England* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Donne’s Political World’, in *Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. by Guibbory, pp. 83-99 (p. 93).

naturally would vnite and combine themselues to that end, if they were not thus compressed' (sigs. I1v-I3r). Although the monarch's laws may seem 'burdenous' (sigs. F2r-F2v), the oath, 'containing nothing, but a *profession of a morall Truth, and a protestation that nothing can make that false*, impugnes no part of that *spirituall* power, which the Pope iustly hath' (sig. Eee2v). Throughout *Pseudo-Martyr*, therefore, the king and the pope are presented as separate earthly paths leading to God. Since, Donne contends, religion is susceptible to human error and misinterpretations, it is safer to bind one's conscience to the king. Should a Catholic refuse the oath of Allegiance either on the grounds that a civil law could bind him spiritually to the king, implying that the king has the power to command the conscience, or out of obedience to the pope, implying that the pope has the power to command the conscience, he would essentially be committing an act of idolatry. In representing both the king and the pope as earthly authorities, Donne highlights the danger of distorting the line between obedience and idolatry arguing that the '*Obedience due to Princes*' should by no means equate to '*blind Obedience*' (sig. Cc1v).¹⁴⁷

Elegy 5 ('Oh let not me serve so') is an example of a work that, due to the rarely noted distinction between obedience and idolatry that it establishes, has been read as having 'a dangerous subversive potential' and as implying 'that monarchs can be deposed'.¹⁴⁸ Although Achsah Guibbory's arguments on the topic are largely persuasive, such an interpretation calls for a reassessment since, as Guibbory herself notes in a separate article in which she explores the erotic elements of *Elegy 5*, the 'political implications are radical, suggesting that monarchs (like beautiful women) only rule by consent of their subjects, not by any divine right'.¹⁴⁹ With this view in mind, the way in which we understand poems such as *Elegy 5* has a direct impact

¹⁴⁷ See Jane Rickard, *Writing the Monarch in Jacobean England: Jonson, Donne, Shakespeare and the Works of King James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), for a similar argument in relation to Donne's sermons, pp. 188-96.

¹⁴⁸ See Achsah Guibbory, "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So': The Politics of Love in Donne's Elegies", *English Literary History*, 57 (1990), 811-27 (p. 827). Guibbory refers to this poem as 'Elegy 6'.

¹⁴⁹ 'Erotic Poetry', in *Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. by Guibbory, pp. 133-48 (p. 139).

on the way in which we understand *Pseudo-Martyr*; similarities need to be flagged up in order to demonstrate a continuity in Donne's thought, otherwise differences would need to be accounted for, either to discern how Donne's political theories developed throughout his lifetime, or to identify irony, insincerity, or playfulness in the texts. The most crucial point to address is the interpretation that *Elegy 5* endorses the deposition of monarchs as this would overturn a fundamental pillar of Donne's political theory established in *Pseudo-Martyr*. In the first instance, it is necessary to note that the poem makes no explicit reference to deposing power. The speaker warns that he will 'renounce thy dalliance' (l. 44) and become a 'Recusant' (l. 45), but these threats, although anti-absolutist in nature *if* the lady is still being compared to a monarch at this point, are not synonymous with deposition: indeed, Sommerville notes that although the 'principle of the supremacy of the public good could be used to justify not only resistance but also the deposition and even execution of the king [...] few believed that such a drastic step was either necessary or politic'.¹⁵⁰ On a more practical note, the lady will not have been removed from her office if she is still in a position to excommunicate the speaker once he has fallen from her love.

The next point to consider is whether or not the speaker's advocacy of consent in a relationship is analogous to the idea of limited monarchy through consent. Arthur Marotti argues that, in the poem, Donne 'uses state service and amorous service as ironic commentary upon one another', and that a relationship between the two is established from the very start.¹⁵¹ Similarly, Guibbory states that the ending of *Elegy 5* 'implies that just as the power of the mistress depends upon the good will of her lover (and the power of the Roman Church depends upon the willing consent of nations), so the power of the queen depends upon her subjects'.¹⁵² These interpretations assume that the mistress's power is equated with the monarch *and* Rome simultaneously throughout the entire poem, and that the speaker's

¹⁵⁰ *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 74-75. A similar point is made by Condren, p. 200.

¹⁵¹ *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 56.

¹⁵² "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So'", 827.

renunciation of Rome is equivalent to the renunciation of a monarch. Yet, the thought of *Elegy 5* is not strictly linear. Rather than using one extended metaphor to present the progress of a relationship, the poem moves between a variety of metaphors to demonstrate that the relationship is prone to change under different circumstances. The opening and closing lines depict alternative outcomes based on the way in which the lady rules; while the former imagines what would happen if she rules like a monarch, the latter imagines what will happen if she governs like the Roman Church. The shift from beginning to end, which hinges on the volte ‘Yet if’ of l. 27, draws a clear distinction between the authorities of the state and the church as the speaker establishes the correct and incorrect ways to obey an earthly ruler.

In the opening ten lines, the speaker establishes that if the lady follows the model of princes in her method of governance, he will obey her as a subject should obey a monarch: not through flattery or idolatry but through good service:

Oh let not me serve so, as those men serve
Whom honors smokes at once fatten and starue;
Poorely enrich’t with great mens words or looks
Nor so write my name in thy loving books
As those idolatrous flatterers; which still
Their Princes Stiles, with many Realmes fullfill
Whence they no tribute haue, and where no sway:
Such Seruices I offer, as shall pay
Themselves: I hate dead Names; Oh then let mee
Fauorit in ordinary or no fauorit bee.¹⁵³
(ll. 1-10)

Flattery was seen to be an important element of the Elizabethan court. Like James who condemns flattery as a vice in *Basilikon Doron*, however, the poem suggests that flattery leads to idolatry. Thus, the speaker here disassociates himself from those ‘idolatrous flatterers’ whose praise for their princes would paradoxically ‘fatten’ due to its lavishness and ‘starve’ due its emptiness. Offering only services ‘as shall pay | Themselves’, he indicates the duty

¹⁵³ John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 2: The Elegies*, ed. by Gary A. Stringer and Paul A. Parrish, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 110-11. All references to *Elegy 5* from this edition.

of a subject to take cognisance of the way in which he or she obeys an earthly authority, the idea being that blind obedience is dangerous because the ruler might lead the way into error.

Whereas princes provide a model of how one should rule, Rome is used as a model of how one should not rule. If the lady misleads the speaker through false hope and ‘flattering eddies’, he states,

Though Hope bred Fayth and Love, thus tought I shall
As Nations do from Rome, from thy Love fall.
My hate shall outgrow thyne, and vtterly
I will renounce thy dalliance: and when I
Ame the Recusant, in that resolute state
What hurts it me to be excommunicate?
(ll. 41-46)

The language surrounding the reference to Rome is imbued with religious terminology: ‘hope’, ‘faith’, ‘excommunicate’. Here, the speaker is not renouncing a prince but the Roman Church, he is comparing himself not to an individual recusant within a state, but to an entire nation that has fallen from Rome in much the same way as England had during the sixteenth-century; to be a recusant or an excommunicate from Rome is, therefore, nothing new or shocking. The double entendre at l. 45 may either imply that recusancy from Rome is a ‘resolute state’ of mind, or that the state of Rome is resolute in the sense that it is weak or feeble. According to the latter, the speaker’s anxiety of being led astray by Rome and his threat to renounce his allegiance to its Church bear a striking resemblance to the ‘Preface’ of *Pseudo-Martyr* in which Donne states that he ‘used no inordinate hast, nor precipitation in binding [his] conscience to any locall Religion’ since he had been laid ‘open to many misinterpretations’ of the Roman religion, and had to ‘blot out, certaine impressions’ and ‘wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken’ (sig. B2v). In this sense, the poem makes a point about the potential for blind obedience to lead to error, and so highlights the limitations of earthly authorities.

A similar idea is explored in Donne’s poem ‘The Sunne Rising’. This poem has frequently been dated as a Jacobean poem based on the reference to the king’s hunting, and,

as such, it would also have been produced during a time in which absolutism, according to Sommerville, was on the rise. Initially, the speaker mocks the sun by implying that it is merely the king's agent, and bids it to call the nation to order and 'Go tell court-huntsmen, that the King will ride'. When these commands are not obeyed, the speaker elevates himself to the role of a monarch and gives the sun a new order:

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic; all wealth's alchemy
Thou sun art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.
(ll. 21-30)

Based on the last line, Lowenstein argues that 'in one sweeping gesture' Donne 'obliterates the external world' so that 'the lovers' intensely private new world is that real world'.¹⁵⁴ This private world that seems to transcend time and space can either be seen as exalted because it is invincible or ridiculous because it mistakenly supposes that it is invincible. It could also be argued that the poem ridicules the speaker for elevating himself to the position of monarch, and that, through the process of self-election, he fails to attain the true power of divine right. Yet, the sun undermines the speaker's authority and, as such, exploits human limitations in relation to time and nature – whether for a pretend monarch or an actual monarch. The sun is, indeed, 'unruly' in the truest sense of the word. Although the speaker's basic self-conscious instinct is to negate or limit the reality of the external world this does not mean that the external world must be annihilated.¹⁵⁵ Meg Lota Brown argues that 'no authority (whether the Pope, the king, or in Donne's case in "The Sunne Rising," the sun) is

¹⁵⁴ David Lowenstein, 'Politics and Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 3-30 (p. 7).

¹⁵⁵ Don Parry Norford, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38, no. 3 (1977), 409-28 (p. 410).

so absolute that it can exercise legitimate power in disregard of circumstances'.¹⁵⁶ Although Brown makes a strong point, it is surely the *speaker* who takes on the role of an authority figure in the poem, and whose power cannot function in disregard of such circumstances of nature as the sun rising. The sun itself, in contrast to its 'virtual beames', cannot be limited.

Having noted Donne's various references to the limitations of earthly authorities, Rebecca Lemon contends that Donne might have advocated the King's policies but that he 'discouraged blind submission to either James or the pope, modifying James's claim to absolute authority by insisting on the sovereignty of one's own conscience'.¹⁵⁷ A fundamental concern with Lemon's argument, however, is that no obvious distinction has been made between Catholic and Protestant casuistry. Indeed, it is relevant that while Catholic casuists placed an emphasis on allowing the conscience to be guided by external authorities, Protestant casuists generally encouraged an acquisition of knowledge that would turn 'the perplexed subject back onto his own conscience'.¹⁵⁸ The idea, therefore, that Donne seeks to 'undermine casuistry' by contending that 'the believer must act from his or her conscience independent of external precepts or authorities',¹⁵⁹ and that this is subversive in one way or another, is inaccurate. In the literary war generated by the oath across Europe, arguments and counter-arguments were articulated through the use of casuistry, a popular mode by which cases of conscience had been explored for three centuries and which had become, particularly during Donne's lifetime, 'increasingly confined to works of "practical" instruction'.¹⁶⁰ The purpose of such casuistry, explains Olga Valbuena, was to provide 'a mode of rational deliberation that negotiated conflicting obligations between spiritual and temporal allegiance or between two incompatible laws'.¹⁶¹ By demonstrating how language

¹⁵⁶ p. 24.

¹⁵⁷ p. 112.

¹⁵⁸ Valbuena, 'Casuistry', p. 70.

¹⁵⁹ Lemon, p. 126.

¹⁶⁰ A. E. Malloch, 'John Donne and the Casuists', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 2, no. 1 (1962), 57-76 (p. 58).

¹⁶¹ 'Casuistry', pp. 57-76 (p. 69).

can be wielded for different purposes, Donne distinguishes the two schools of casuistry as good and bad. The ‘Romane Authors’ are presented in *Pseudo-Martyr* as self-serving and malicious, since they ‘build Equiuocation, which is like a Tower of *Babel*’ in order to ‘get about all earthly Magistracie’ (sig. L2v). Roman casuistry, for Donne, is intrinsically deceptive because it manipulates already existing arguments to justify a standpoint; it is an end within itself. Protestant casuistry, in contrast, is a means to an end, and a way by which a person can justify his or her actions without compromising his or her spiritual development. For Donne, casuistry ought to inform but not seek to capture the conscience.

Donne’s condemnation of Catholic casuistry and his emphasis on the importance of the conscience have important connections to Protestant casuistry. This is apparent in *Pseudo-Martyr*’s emphasis on the formation of the conscience, as well as in the style and structure of the work. Despite Donne’s indisputable knowledge of and interest in the genre, research regarding his representation of casuistry is surprisingly limited. Yet, those who have acknowledged casuistry as a crucial aspect in works such as *Pseudo-Martyr*, *Biathanatos*, *Ignatius His Conclave* and ‘Satyre III’ have, remarkably, tended to portray Donne’s attitude towards the genre as ‘contradictory’ and ‘ambivalent’.¹⁶² In the article ““To Stand Inquiring Right”: The Casuistry of Donne’s “Satyre III””, Camille Wells Slight argues, for instance, that Donne was simultaneously ‘fascinated’ and ‘repelled’ by Catholic casuistry.¹⁶³ In her later book, *The Casuistical Tradition*, Slight proceeds to present Donne as a failed casuist whose ‘casuistry lacks the scope and general applicability of comprehensive discussions or principles’ because ‘his argument relies too heavily on the methods he condemns’.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Olga Valbuena states that although Donne ‘appears to denounce and certainly does satirize the methods and especially the motives of Jesuit casuists and equivocators’, he finally comes to depend ‘on

¹⁶² Camille W. Slight, ““To Stand Inquiring Right”: The Casuistry of Donne’s “Satyre III””, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 12, no. 1 (1972), 85-101 (p. 88).

¹⁶³ ““To Stand Inquiring Right””, p. 87.

¹⁶⁴ *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 141-49.

their methods to defend the liberty of the individual faced with a practical moral impasse with moral consequences'.¹⁶⁵ Although both critical accounts are valuable in assessing Donne's attack on the Roman casuist by exposing the differences between Catholic and Protestant casuistry, neither recognise the irony that underlines Donne's mockery of the genre. He is not repelled by the *use* of casuistry, but by its *misuse*. By creating a dynamic in which the casuist's polemical discourse is its own destruction, *Pseudo-Martyr* demonstrates a clearly comprehensive scope and understanding of the general principles of casuistry. Through a satirical application of these principles, Donne undermines the validity of oversubtle arguments, which threaten to lead others astray, and does this to direct readers back to their own consciences.

An example of this occurs in chapter VIII when Donne comments that 'we may at once lay open the infirmity, and insufficiency of [the Roman casuists'] *Rules*, and apply the same to our present purpose' (sig. Kk4r). In the context of a chapter which is essentially a playful exercise in the art of argument, this comment demonstrates that Donne uses the methods of the Roman casuist deliberately in order to exploit the dangerous consequences of sophistry and blind obedience to earthly authorities. These 'Rules give no infallible direction to the conscience' (sig. LL2r), he writes, and cannot therefore be used as a basis for making important moral decisions. Donne's point is made explicit when he applies the Roman casuists' methods to his own argument to demonstrate the faulty logic by which Catholics risk being misled – a section of *Pseudo-Martyr* which Slights describes as being 'too complicated to treat adequately' (1992: 148). Yet it is precisely the complicated nature of Donne's argument that serves to mock the Roman casuist, since he intentionally makes his point in an obscure fashion to parody what he considers to be the obscure style of casuistical reasoning. In discussing the principle of '*Metum iustum* [justified fear], which is, *such a feare as may fall vpon a constant man, and yet not remove his habite of Constancy*', Donne relays the Roman

¹⁶⁵ 'Casuistry', p. 66.

casuists' rule that if a person experiences a justified fear, which includes 'the feare of *Torture, Imprisonment, Exile, Bondage, Losse of temporall goods, or the greater part thereof, or infamy, and dishonour*' as well as of death, then it is acceptable for that person to transgress. The only time that a '*just feare*' may not be applied to a situation is to 'excuse a man from doing any *Euill*, yet that is meant of such an *Euill*, as is *Euill* naturally' (i.e. a deed that is intrinsically evil). Donne applies this line of reasoning to his own argument by stating that the oath 'is not Naturally Euill' since the authority of a king is '*morall and natural*'; the oath, he goes on to write, only 'became Euill, because it was Forbidden' by the pope. By the logic of the Catholic casuist, then, 'the taking of the Oath were so excusable, as the refusing thereof could not be excused' (sigs. Mm4r-4v). This *reductio ad absurdum*, to use a term that A. E. Malloch applies to arguments made elsewhere in chapter VIII,¹⁶⁶ exploits the straw man logic of the Catholic casuist who uses a set of general rules to manipulate an argument for his own ends.

Donne's critique of the arguments typical of the Roman casuist in relation to oaths is dramatised in his poem 'Woman's Constancy'. In this poem, the speaker confronts his lover by anticipating the duplicitous excuses that she could make in order to rescind a 'lovers' contract' (l. 9):

Now thou hast loved me one whole day,
 Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?
 Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow?
 (ll. 1-3)

The use of the term 'antedate' implies a fraudulent attempt to pervert the course of justice. This, along with the ironic use of the phrase 'one whole day' and the idea that such a radical change of mind could occur between 'Now' and 'Tomorrow', highlights the absurdity of this argument which is based on illegality and unsubstantiated reasoning.

The next excuse that the speaker anticipates is that the oath was not binding in the first place. Would the lover argue, he asks, that:

¹⁶⁶ 'John Donne and the Casuists', p. 72.

We are not just those persons which we were?
 Or that oaths made in reverential fear
 Of Love and his wrath any may forswear?
 (ll. 5-7)

The contents and ironic tone of these lines resonate with Donne's later mockery of '*just fear*' in *Pseudo-Martyr*, a notion on which, as Donne states with reference to the Catholic doctrine of mental reservation, 'the *Casuists* agree' (sig. Mm2v). In both texts, individuals who use fear as an excuse to invalidate an oath after it has been taken are ridiculed. This is because such excuses, or 'scapes' made for the lover's 'own end to justify' (ll. 9-14), are substantiated by the casuistical arguments made by external authorities that disregard truth. The lover, therefore, has 'no way but falsehood to be true' (l. 13). This idea resembles Donne's representation of the Roman casuist in *Pseudo-Martyr*, whose arguments are only true to the falseness of their nature.

In the last four lines of the poem the speaker quashes the hypothetical arguments which he has previously conjured by appropriating the supposed excuses for his own ends:

Vain lunatic! Against these scapes I could
 Dispute, and conquer, if I would,
 Which I abstain to do,
 For by tomorrow I may think so too.
 (ll. 14-17)

Although 'Woman's Constancy' has often been read as a misogynistic poem,¹⁶⁷ the speaker—though here supposed to be male—is gender-ambiguous. It is relevant that this poem, which at first glance seems to be gender-focused, does not only leave the question of the speaker's sex open, but, in these final lines, renders this question somewhat irrelevant by suggesting that each lover is as fickle as the other. That the speaker could 'Dispute' against these 'scapes' hints at the casuistical convention of responding 'point by point [...] to conclude a debate

¹⁶⁷ For an example of an interpretation of 'Woman's Constancy' that highlights its misogynistic elements, see Douglas J. Canfield, *Word as Bond in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Restoration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 157-165.

by leaving no argument unanswered'.¹⁶⁸ The 'conventionality' of such a tactic, explains North, typically 'gave one's opponent a ready-made structure for a counterattack' which perpetuated yet more casuistry, since no argument could be convincing enough to prevent further argument.¹⁶⁹ Like chapter VIII of *Pseudo-Martyr*, 'Woman's Constancy' is a playful exercise in the art of argument which parodies the frailty of the human mind that relies on casuistical authorities, instead of the conscience, when making and breaking oaths. On this point, both texts demonstrate how oaths between human beings are susceptible to human error, and so cannot bind the conscience indefinitely. It is therefore vital that a person who swears to an oath only does so with a cautious understanding that as the conscience develops, so such promises may need to be modified.

The idea in *Pseudo-Martyr* that an earthly oath can be broken within the conscience of a subject for a higher cause resonates with Donne's well-known Holy sonnet 'Batter my heart'. In this poem, the speaker begs for the 'three-personed God' (l. 1) to release him of all earthly bonds so that he, the speaker, may admit God into himself:

Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again
(ll. 9-11)

Although the identity of the 'enemy' is left ambiguous, the motif of marriage and divorce indicates that an oath of some sort has been made to someone or something contrary to God, which recalls the 'lovers' contract' of 'Woman's Constancy'.¹⁷⁰ The speaker's plea for God to 'breake' this 'knot' demonstrates, however, that the breaking of an oath for reasons of virtue would require divine intervention. Unlike the oath made between the speaker and the 'enemy' which, being described in legal terms, relies on outward displays of conformity,

¹⁶⁸ Marcy L. North, 'Anonymity's Subject: James I and the Debate over the Oath of Allegiance', *New Literary History*, 33, no. 2 (2002), 215-32 (p. 219).

¹⁶⁹ p. 219.

¹⁷⁰ Hadfield argues that the language of marriage could provide writers with 'an ideal vehicle for commenting on the nature of oaths as binding promises in the years surrounding the Gunpowder Plot' ('Bad faith in *All's Well That Ends Well*', p. 3).

the imagined spiritual union between the speaker and God relies on an internal binding. At the end of the poem the notion of oath-taking is sexualised as the speaker asks to be ‘ravished’ by God so that his religious commitment may be consummated. It is only at the point that God has entered into him, making the external internal, that the speaker feels his conscience will be truly bound.¹⁷¹

The language of ‘Batter my heart’, in which the speaker laments that he is ‘betroth’d’ to God’s enemy and craves to be ‘enthral[led]’ by God, echoes the Preface to *Pseudo-Martyr* in which Donne states that he will not ‘betroth or enthal’ himself ‘to any one science, which should possess or denominate’ him (sig. B2r). Donne’s resistance to blind obedience is not limited to the pope, religion or casuistry, but extends to all external authorities including the king. As it is stated in *Satyre III*, monarchs may have the power to ‘kill whom they hate’ on behalf of God, yet they are merely ‘hangmen to fate’ (ll. 91-92). This indicates that monarchs do not have jurisdiction over free will and so cannot force the subject’s conscience. As such, although ‘thou mayest rightly obey power’—and it is important to note that this power is ‘rightly’ obeyed—a subject must know the ‘bounds’ of that power and not ‘be tied | To man’s laws’. To ‘choose men’s unjust | Power from God claim’d, than God himself to trust’ (ll. 94ff.) is classified in this poem as idolatry.

In 1607, two years before *Pseudo-Martyr* was composed, Thomas Morton advised Donne to waive his court hopes and enter into holy orders. Having just been made Dean of Gloucester, Morton offered, by permission of the king, to quit his benefice and estate Donne in it. ‘Remember, Mr. Donne,’ he warns, ‘no man’s education or parts make him too good for this employment, which is to be an ambassador for the God of glory’.¹⁷² But Donne was

¹⁷¹ The question of whether the binding language of an oath in early Stuart England can or indeed should bind the individual to the state is not unique to Donne. John Kerrigan points out, for example, that Shakespeare’s *Henry V* gives several examples of how ‘oaths were broken’ upon just cause because whilst ‘honour’ and ‘status’ is made in ‘the stake of your word’, this ‘honour can be held in the breaking of a word if it brings honour by other means’, in John Kerrigan, ‘Oaths, Threats and Henry V’, *The Review of English Studies*, 63, iss. 261 (2012), 551-71 (p. 555).

¹⁷² Izaak Walton, *The Lives of John Donne Dr. in Divinity, and the Late Dean of Saint Pauls Church London*, 2nd edn (London, 1658), p.21.

not yet ready to eschew his hope of a state employment, and not because he felt that religious employment was beneath him, as Morton had implied. As we know from *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne believed that he had ‘no ordinary calling to that function’ of Divinity, and he thus declined Morton’s offer with a hasty justification for his decision:

I may not accept your offer: but, sir, my refusal is not for that I think myself too good for that calling, for which kings, if they think so, are not good enough; nor for that my education and learning, though not eminent, may not, being assisted with God’s grace and humility, render me in some measure fit for it: but I dare make so dear a friend as you are my confessor: some irregularities of my life have been so visible to some men, that though I have, I thank God, made my peace with Him by penitential resolutions against them, and, by the assistance of His grace, banished them my affections: yet this, which God knows to be so, is not so visible to men, as to free me from their censures, and, it may be, that sacred calling from a dishonour.¹⁷³

It is relevant to note that, for Donne, a sacred calling is the highest commission with which one can be charged; so high, in fact, that no human being, monarchs included, can properly satisfy the demands of that office. Secular employment would be preferable to Donne for two key reasons. First, it would enable him to nurture a doubting conscience, and thus to defend the foundation of Christianity from the error of religious assurance. Second, (and in looking forward to the next chapter on ‘Resistance’) it would put him in a public office beneath the divinely ordained king, which would mean, crucially, that Donne would be entitled, or rather, obliged, to resist the royal prerogative if the king were to act against the Word of God.¹⁷⁴ In this respect, as William Baldwin put it *A Mirror for Magistrates*, political

¹⁷³ Walton, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷⁴ Sommerville argues that those writing on monarchical authority before 1640, whether from an absolutist or anti-absolutist position, did not support the right of an individual to consider or to take private action against a monarch (*Royalists & Patriots*, p. 75). He further states that ‘[t]hose who did admit the legitimacy of resistance were unanimous in dedaring that it had to take place on *public*, not private authority. That is to say, the king had to be resisted by the whole commonwealth or its representative institutions, or, according to the Catholic point of view, by the church acting through the pope. No private individual, it was agreed by all, could actively resist his ruler’ (*Royalists & Patriots*, p. 75).

Sommerville’s point that everybody agreed on the matter of the private individual might be slightly overstated. A range of views, for example, is presented in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, a text that played an important role in defining the resistance theory during the early modern period. For the political importance of the text in the early modern period, see Hadfield, *National Identity*, pp.81-107. For a poem that supports Sommerville’s view, see William Baldwin’s ‘Howe the Lorde Mowbray promoted by Kyng Richarde the seconde, was by hym banyshed the Realme, and dyed miserably in exyle’, in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 102-3, quoted in Scott Lucas, “Let none such office take, save he that can for right his

offices were ‘not gaynful spoiles for the greedy to hunt for, but payneful toyles for the heedie to be charged with’.¹⁷⁵ When Donne would eventually become Dean of St Paul’s, he would treat state religion in the same way that he treated any other state matter: by emphasising temporal obedience to the king, while also making it clear that legal ordinances, along with the commands of all earthly authorities, including preachers, must be transgressed if they threaten to shake the foundation of Christianity. His approach on the pulpit, akin to his approach as a writer of polemic, would be to turn members of the congregation back onto their own consciences and to direct them to the foundation of Christianity: ‘the *foundation* it selfe is Christ himselfe in his *Word*; his *Scriptures*’, he would say in his 1625 sermon on Psalms 11:3, and ‘certainely they love the *House* best, that love the *foundation* best: not they, that impute to the *Scriptures* such an *Obscuritie*, as should make them *in-intelligible* to us, or such a defect as should make them *insufficient* in themselves’.¹⁷⁶

Brooke Conti states that ‘*Pseudo-Martyr* is nearly the only source of information about the occasions or motives behind Donne’s conversion, which remains one of the greatest

prince forsake’: *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Resistance Theory and the Elizabethan Monarchical Republic’, in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. by John F. McDiarmid (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 91-107 (p. 99). In analysing the early stanzas of Baldwin’s poem, in which ‘the ghost of Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk (d. 1399), recalls his leading role in the Lords Appellant’s riding of 1387’, Lucas notes that ‘Baldwin stresses that Mowbray undertook his revolt not as a private individual but in his official capacity as “Marshall of the realme” and that his motive was solely to the laudable desire to protect “Iustice, right and law” (p. 99). As such, this poem draws on Calvin’s insistence that ‘private citizens may never resist an unjust ruler’ (p. 100); Hadfield, *National Identity*, p. 99.

However, an anonymous tragedy in the *Mirror* entitled ‘How sir Richard Nevell Earle of Warwike, and his brother John Lord Marquise Mountacute through their to-much boldness wer slayne at Barnet field’, Lucas states, ‘asks readers to admire Warwick’s actions and to entertain the idea that even a private individual (at least one of the upper classes) may oppose and even overthrow an erring ruler if he does so in the service of the people or God’s law’ (‘Let none such office take’, p. 104). Although this poem leads us to modify Sommerville’s view somewhat, Lucas’s conditional clause must be taken into account, for ‘[n]owhere in the collection do the poets endorse revolt against royal authority for the purposes of ambition, greed or private grudge’ (p. 106). This view is further explained by Conal Condren who notes that ‘if a private man is stirred by an extraordinary spirit, he thereby assumes an “extraordinary vocation”; dealing with the tyrant makes him a public governor’ (Condren, p. 201; for the magistrate’s right to resist where the subject cannot, see also Hadfield, *National Identity*, pp. 97-99).

¹⁷⁵ p. 63.

¹⁷⁶ *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, vol. VI, no. 12 (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), p. 253. See also Shami’s work on the sermons in *Conformity in Crisis*, at length; and ‘Donne’s Protestant Casuistry: Cases of Conscience in the “Sermons”’, *Studies in Philology*, 80, no. 1 (Winter 1983), 53-66; and ‘Donne on Discretion’, *ELH*, 47, no. 1 (Spring 1980), 48-66. See also Nancy E. Wright, ‘The Figura of the Martyr in John Donne’s Sermons’, *English Literary History*, 56, no. 2 (Summer 1989), 293-309; and Klause, 181-215.

mysteries of his biography'. Like many others, Conti has searched in vain for the 'event at the heart of [Donne's] story: the conversion itself'.¹⁷⁷ It is unlikely that such a search will ever prove fruitful, for Donne thoroughly undermines the idea of converting from one religious institution to another in establishing that there is only a single true and foundational Christianity, which the churches, as manmade institutions, have the capacity to corrupt. While the church is accorded a sister earthly authority alongside the state, Donne often posits 'true religion' against the teachings and actions of the church, and as such draws a distinction between Christianity, which is divine, and the fallible, manmade institution that is the church (in particular, although not exclusively, the Roman Church). 'Religion' and 'church' are thus not synonymous within Donne's political and religious thought. Indeed, it is the state's permission of the doubting conscience that protects true religion, by seeking to split false 'certaintie' from the capacity to outwardly act upon it. By separating the state and the church on the basis that one of these earthly institutions attempts to capture the conscience while the other does not, Donne argues that true religion is not endangered by the threat of political turmoil unless the divinely ordained monarch threatens to shake the foundation of Christianity – this being the only religious component that warrants uncompromising assurance. The church, by contrast, can too often demand that such assurance be acted upon in other matters, as in the cases of Donne's pseudo-martyrs. Donne thus argues that the church must accept the division between outward conformity and inner conscience demanded by the state, and do this for the good of religion itself. With such a fascinating argument in mind, the true mystery at the heart of Donne's story is that a text providing our most profound insight into the author's religious and political thought is often considered too boring to read. Examined in its entirety as a deeply scholarly and fecund piece of work, *Pseudo-Martyr* suggests, rather strikingly, that during his middle years Donne did not convert: he conformed.

¹⁷⁷ pp. 52-53.

CHAPTER 2

Resisting Resistance:
Donne's Case against Church Militancy

On 27 December 1594, Jean Chastel attempted to stab Henri IV of France in the throat but only managed to hit his victim in the face as the king had bent down unexpectedly.¹⁷⁸ A few days later, Chastel was executed for treason. The parliamentary decree against Chastel recorded the young man's belief 'that it is lawfull to kill kinges, and that king Henry the fourth, now raigning, is not in the Church until hee hath the approbation of the Pope'.¹⁷⁹ For royalists, Chastel was a traitor whose misplaced stroke against the king, which resulted in a cracked tooth rather than a fatal wound, was evidence of divine intervention. Since it was believed both on the Continent and in England that Jesuits were the main proponents of the theory of tyrannicide, and since Chastel had been educated at the Jesuit college of Clermont in Paris, members of the Society became the prime suspects in the Parlement's search for accomplices to the crime; even though authorities were never able to turn up any hard evidence of Jesuit complicity, the Order was expelled from France as a result.¹⁸⁰ While the Society's stance remained unclear on the attempted assassination, some supporters of the

¹⁷⁸ anon., *The decree of the court of Parliament against Iohn Chastel, scholler, student in the Colledge of the Iesuites, upon the parricide by him attempted against the kings person. Also for the banishment of the whole societie of the said Iesuites out of France and all the kings dominions, withal containing a prohibition, not to send their children to any colledge of the saide societie*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1595), p. 6. For further details, see Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590-1615)* (Cornwall: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 44-50.

¹⁷⁹ anon., *The decree of the court of Parliament against Iohn Chastel*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Nelson, p. 46-49. In France, Jesuit magistrates 'secured their complete exdusion from the Parlement's jurisdiction in 1594 for allegedly promoting and assisting in Jean Chastel's attempted assassination of Henri IV', even though Chastel denied, under torture, that the Society had encouraged the attack (Nelson, pp. 2, 47). It should be noted that, ironically, the attack on the Society following the Chastel incident would have been the last thing that Henry IV wanted – that is, to be subjected to a Gallican I-told-you-so stream of advice on the danger of Jesuits that he had previously dismissed (see, Nelson, pp. 16-17). It is worth referring to Nelson's book, at length, for an excellent account of the Jesuits and the monarchy in France, an exactly analogous process, it seems, to what was happening in England, with former but moderate Leaguers and other Catholics also blaming the Society for the political extremes of the final phase of the League.

Catholic League had defended Chastel as a saint-like figure and as a hero of the true faith.¹⁸¹ The Paris priest Jean Boucher, for instance, praised the nineteen-year-old for having ‘attempted to kill “a heretic, a recidivist, a profaner of sacred things, a declared public enemy, an oppressor of religion, [...] a tyrant instead of a king, a usurper instead of a natural lord, a criminal instead of a legitimate Prince.”’¹⁸² The idea that one had a duty to disobey heretical monarchs in order to preserve religious truth constituted the foundation of early modern resistance theories.¹⁸³ These theories never condoned regicide, but sometimes endorsed tyrannicide; they never incited rebellion, but always permitted self-defence. Thus, in the rhetorical battle to define the recusant’s rights, resistance theorists appropriated the absolutist doctrine of the king’s two bodies, arguing that, as ‘a *persona* the king could do no wrong, but in doing wrong he might cease in that *persona*’.¹⁸⁴ This crucial qualification, writes Conal Condren, ‘could accommodate apparently absolutist maxims to critical purposes: subjects must obey kings but tyrants are not kings’. As such, resistance ‘was never said to be to just authority’ but was a ‘defence against madmen, usurpers and tyrants’.¹⁸⁵

Candace Lines argues that, in relation to early modern martyrdom, ‘it is ridiculously obvious to assert that martyrdom and resistance are linked: acts of resistance tend, after all, to create martyrs’.¹⁸⁶ For Catholic zealots in England who considered enforced conformity

¹⁸¹ Ronald G. Asch, ‘Sacred Kingship in France and England in the Age of the Wars of Religion: From Disenchantment to Re-enchantment?’, in *England’s Wars of Religions, Revisited*, ed. by Charles W.A. Prior and Glenn Burgess (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 27-47 (p. 34).

¹⁸² *Apologie pour Jehan Chastel* (1595), quoted in Robert Appelbaum, *Terrorism Before the Letter: Mythography and Political Violence in England, Scotland, and France 1559-1642* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 193.

¹⁸³ For the early modern notion of resistance as a form of self-defence, see Condren, pp. 194-97; Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, pp. 68-77; and R. M. Kingdon, ‘Calvinism and Resistance Theory, 1550-1580’, in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. by J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 194-218 (pp. 206-214). In particular, note Condren’s explanation of how rebellion was often ‘redescribed’ as self-defence because ‘the self was largely anaphoric for a *persona*,’ and so ‘defence could also be an expression of the meta-duty to the relevant office, and this in turn involved the protection of those seen under its aegis. Even as a naked soul the self was a locus of responsibility’ (Condren, p. 194).

¹⁸⁴ Condren, p. 279. A prominent proponent of this argument was George Buchanan (1506-1582), a *monarchomarch* who argued for the separation of the king’s two bodies. See Howard Nenner, ‘Loyalty and the Law: The Meaning of Trust and the Right of Resistance in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of British Studies*, no. 4 (October 2009), 859-70 (pp. 862-64).

¹⁸⁵ pp. 279, 205.

¹⁸⁶ p. 24.

as an affront to true faith, religious moderation, or any form of tolerance towards the state, was to be abhorred.¹⁸⁷ First, it was thought that outward conformity to a heretical regime could annihilate the Catholic cause by leading to ‘full conformity in the next generation’.¹⁸⁸ Second, it was deemed possible that a persecuting monarch had been instated by God in order to test the steadfastness of the subject’s conscience, or even to punish those of the true faith for not being good enough Christians.¹⁸⁹ To succumb to the state under such conditions would be to expose one’s moral frailty; resistance may lead to temporal punishment, but the endurance of suffering was a gift from God that would confer deep spiritual confidence.¹⁹⁰ Ironically, then, monarchs that attempted to unify the nation through acts of religious coercion/persecution had the potential to actually perpetuate schism by strengthening the resolve of nonconformists. This is evident in the examples of Robert Persons and Edmund Campion who had, since the Jesuit mission to England began in 1580, insisted on the importance of uncompromising recusancy.¹⁹¹ In the history of religious dissent in the early

¹⁸⁷ Gabriel Glickman, ‘Review: Early Modern England: Persecution, Martyrdom: And Toleration?’, *The Historical Journal*, 51, no. 1 (March 2008), 251-67 (p. 254).

¹⁸⁸ Elliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience: alternatives open to Recusants and Puritans under Elizabeth 1 and James 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 1-5.

¹⁸⁹ ‘The World’s Worst Worm’, pp. 114-16. Wright provides a useful and succinct overview of writers who represented this view, including the Marian martyr John Bradford, who judged ‘the arrival of a persecuting Catholic monarch a “just punishment for our unthankfulness and horrible contempt” under Edward’, and Wolfgang Musculus, who argued that both the reprobate and the godly had to face adversity in order to repent for their sins (pp. 114-19).

¹⁹⁰ For two interesting arguments on the topic, see Wright, ‘The World’s Worst Worm’, pp. 113-33; and Monta, pp. 117-57.

¹⁹¹ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitheron: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 49-50. It was, in particular, anathema to Persons’s design for the mission that any political accommodation should be made by Catholics; this, in fact, became one of the major sore points in his relations with John Donne’s uncle, Jasper Heywood, who headed the mission in 1581 and who was drafting a petition to the state for Catholic toleration. It is worth stipulating that Heywood was really only a provisional, acting superior because Persons had retired to the continent after the execution of Campion; Persons, in effect, retained authority in all but day to day business in England. Heywood’s superiority terminated in 1583, when he was captured at Queenborough and imprisoned. By 1585 there were differences between Heywood and Persons that could not be reconciled and this petition was at the centre of their disagreement. Persons won the support of Allen and Acquaviva, and Heywood, who was told to return to Rome, was made an outcast. For details relating to these events, see Dennis Flynn, ‘“Out of Step”: Six Supplementary Notes on Jasper Heywood’, in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits: Essays in celebration of the first centenary of Campion Hall, Oxford (1896-1996)*, ed. by Thomas M. McCoog, S.J. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996), pp. 179-192; Flynn, ‘“Out of Step”’, p. 191. This quarrel was evident to contemporaries such as Thomas Bell who includes a section in his *Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie* entitled ‘Of the dissention amongst the Iesuites’ which states that

modern period, Elliot Rose therefore states that the ‘last, most universally despised of all solutions was that of the “church-papist”, the papist at heart who outwardly conformed’; such men, he notes, ‘would have liked to be good Catholics, if they could, but were forced by the pusillanimity of their nature to be bad Catholics’.¹⁹²

But, of course, many people who conformed to some degree did not think that they were anything like the church-papist stereotype, and they often believed that their co-religionists who were ‘guilty of political extremism and perhaps even religious heterodoxy [...] did not deserve to be tolerated’.¹⁹³ To such individuals, being a ‘church-papist’ did not obviously mean that one was a bad Catholic or even a schismatic, nor was it obvious that recusancy was the only or even the best way to keep the Catholic cause alive.¹⁹⁴ While zealots were associating resistance and, in some cases, tyrannicide with martyrdom, partial conformists were therefore presenting active resistance as treasonous and as an act leading to pseudo-martyrdom. Even in cases of tyranny, most considered it preferable to be governed by a tyrant than to live in anarchy. As Andrew Hadfield notes, James VI&I had described the worst that a monarch can do ‘as a pointed contrast to the greater evils caused by rebellion’, and many agreed that ‘however bad a king may be, nothing can be done because any alternative is worse’.¹⁹⁵ That resistance was not always associated with martyrdom is clear

The Iesuite Heywood, was against the Iesuite Parsons; neither would Parsons be vnder Heywood, nor Heywood vnder Parsons. Parsons alledged, that their generall had appointed him to be the prouinciall all ouer all the Iesuite, in England, & consequently ouer Heywood. But Heywood replied, that his mission was immediately from the Pope, and that he thereby was exempted from all submission to him. This quarrel gr[e]w to be hote, and had many partakers on eyther side.

(sig. D1v)

¹⁹² pp. 111, 104, respectively. See also ‘The World’s Worst Worm’, in which Wright demonstrates that people were concerned that pretended conformity could induce a guilty conscience that would invoke melancholy and despair (p. 121).

¹⁹³ Lake and Questier, ‘Margaret Clitherow’, p. 89.

¹⁹⁴ Lake and Questier, ‘Margaret Clitherow’, p. 88.

¹⁹⁵ *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, p. 84. See also Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, pp. 18-24; and Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions*, 3rd edn (London; New York, 1983), which connects the theory of obligation in early modern England to the doctrine of the Great Chain of Being, ‘the most persuasive foundation for a theory of non-resistance available to the Tudor writer’ (p. 2). Fletcher explains that the ‘theory of obligation employed most frequently [in Tudor England] was that of Romans 13:1 “The powers that be are ordained of God.” [...] The doctrine was one of non-resistance rather than obedience because it was usually qualified by a paraphrase of Peter’s statement in Acts 5:29 that “We ought to obey God rather than men”’ (p. 2). A similar view is put

from absolutist texts like *Pseudo-Martyr*, which endorsed full conformity, as well as in the various defences of limited or partial conformity produced by Catholics.¹⁹⁶ For example, the Roman Catholic priest and pro-Protestant polemicist Thomas Bell (1573-1610), who has been termed the ‘leading proponent of the so-called “church-papist” position’, argued publicly that it was possible to be both Catholic and loyal to the Protestant state.¹⁹⁷ This idea also appears in such fictional works as Anthony Copley’s poem *A Fig for Fortune* (1596), which is thought to have acted as a plea to the state for the toleration of loyal Catholics.¹⁹⁸

For Bell and Copley, the loyal Catholic could be defined against the seditious Jesuit.¹⁹⁹ In fact, the representation of the Jesuit as a common enemy in an otherwise unified England offered an excellent strategy by which partial conformists could take the heat off of themselves, as well as reduce the conceptual gap between their values and those of the state. This became particularly important after the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, when royalist writers were targeting the pope as a common enemy and an alien threat to the nation. The culture of scare-mongering in relation to the papal deposing power could implicate all Catholics as a fifth column. Due to the assumed connection between the Society of Jesus and tyrannicide theory, obedient Catholics could use the distinction between conformism and treachery to position themselves within a loyal, conformist camp and position the Jesuit as the real ‘other’, outside of the camp that they claimed to share with Protestants. Such anti-Jesuitism was also being employed by Protestants as a strategy to protect the established church ‘by

forward by Howard Nenner who argues that James VI&I was more concerned with non-resistance than he was with providing ‘a reasoned analysis of political obligation’ (Nenner, p. 862).

¹⁹⁶ Robert Persons distinguishes between different types of Catholics in his *A briefe discourse containing certaine reasons, why Catholikes refuse to goe to church*, first part.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Bell, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie* (London, 1603), at length; Lake and Questier, ‘Margaret Clitherow’, p. 58; Alexandra Walsham, “‘Yielding to the Extremity of the Time’: Conformity, Orthodoxy and the Post-Reformation Catholic Community”, in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660*, ed. by Peter Lake and Michael Questier (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), pp. 211-36 (pp. 233-36).

¹⁹⁸ Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield, ‘Two Sussex Authors: Thomas Drant and Anthony Copley’, in *Art, Literature and Religion in Early Modern Sussex: Culture and Conflict*, ed. by Matthew Dimmock, Andrew Hadfield and Paul Quinn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 41-60 (p. 56).

¹⁹⁹ It should, however, be noted that while Copley’s attempt to make political accommodation in *A Fig for Fortune* became ‘a target for some Jesuits’ criticism’, the author’s ‘nuanced Catholic loyalty’ also failed to ‘satisfy authorities’. See Anthony Copley, *A Fig for Fortune by Anthony Copley: A Catholic Response to The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Susannah Brietz Monta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 14, 12, respectively.

disassociating it from the popery of which it was accused by Protestant radicals or nonconforming Puritans'.²⁰⁰ In fact, unlike Alison Shell who argues that in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England 'Catholicism was the enemy against which an emergent Protestant nationalism defined itself',²⁰¹ Arnold Pritchard contends that the Appellants, a group of secular priests who wished to show loyalty to both king and pope, created 'the Myth of the Evil Jesuit' in order to justify the irreconcilable differences between the state and the Catholic church.²⁰² The Appellant Christopher Bagshaw (1552-1625?), for example, portrayed the Jesuits as a deceptive group who put on a 'catholick shew of so true religion, as impossible for any one to equall them in any degree of perfection' even though 'in very deede they are men of the most corrupt manners, imperfect life, and stayne of religion'.²⁰³ The 'Evil Jesuit' was, in effect, the ultimate traitor and pseudo-martyr that could highlight the loyalty of others by comparison.

In response to such accusations, the Society complained that it was being misrepresented. In his study on the political thought of the Jesuits, Harro Höpfl takes a sympathetic approach to the Society and argues that its members did not, indeed, deserve

²⁰⁰ Arthur Marotti, 'John Donne's Conflicted Anti-Catholicism', *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 101, no. 3 (July 2002), pp. 358-79 (p. 359). For an example of a Protestant response to the Jesuits following the Gunpowder Plot, see Lancelot Andrewes, who held the Jesuits specifically responsible for the Gunpowder Plot, in his sermon *On the Gun-Powder-Treason*, in *XCVI Sermons by the right honourable and reverend father in God, Lancelot Andrewes* (London, 1661), pp. 889-900. For Andrewes's anti-Jesuitism in this sermon, see Stefania Tutino, 'Notes on Machiavelli and Ignatius Loyola in John Donne's Ignatius His Conclave and Pseudo-Martyr', *The English Historical Review*, 119, no. 484 (November 2004), 1308-21 (p. 1315). For further discussion on the topic, see Michael Questier, "'Like locusts over all the world': conversion, indoctrination and the Society of Jesus in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England", in *The Reckoned Expense*, ed. by McCoog, pp. 265-84. Questier argues that there was 'a well-established Protestant tradition' of comparing Jesuits with locusts. 'To their Protestant opponents they certainly seemed to have all the qualities of locusts. They were ubiquitous; they swarmed; they were entirely parasitical and brought nothing but destruction' (pp. 265-66). For a Puritan anti-Jesuit sermon, see William Attersoll (1591-1640), *The badges of Christianity. Or, A treatise of the sacraments fully declared out of the word of God* (London, 1606), which describes the Jesuits as 'a pestilent brood of vipers [...] sending abroad swarms of their Iesuits' to 'infect the people of the land with the leaven of false doctrine' (sig. A3r).

²⁰¹ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 109.

²⁰² For the Archpriest controversy see, Pritchard, pp. 120-74. Pritchard's study remains the most thorough and comprehensive account of the conflict between Jesuits and Appellants during the period. For another interesting account, see Tutino, 'Notes on Machiavelli and Ignatius Loyola', pp. 1308-1321.

²⁰³ Christopher Bagshaw, *A sparing discoverie of our English Iesuits, and of Fa. Parsons proceedings vnder pretence of promoting the Catholike faith in England for a caveat to all true Catholikes our very louing brethren and friends, how they embrace such very uncatholike, though Iesuiticall designs* (London, 1601), sig. A3v.

the fearful reputation generated by contemporary polemic. Due to their ‘over-riding preoccupation with *principatus* [rule]’ as well as their ‘tender solicitude for princes’, Höpfl argues, ‘it is surprising that Jesuits of all people should have been associated [...] with that most potentially anarchic of all remedies for tyranny, namely tyrannicide’. Höpfl contends that the Jacobean oath of allegiance was a key source of the Society’s misrepresentation as it established ‘the *canard* that tyrannicide was a specifically Jesuit doctrine’.²⁰⁴ The view that the oath was a source of such misrepresentation was put forward by many persuasive Jesuits taking part in the pamphlet war that had been generated by the Jacobean statute, most notably Robert Bellarmine and Robert Persons who attacked the oath for juxtaposing—and in their view thereby compounding—the topics of the papal deposing power and tyrannicide.

²⁰⁵ In his *A discussion of the answere of M. William Barlow*, which was written as a response to William Barlow’s poorly argued defence of the oath of allegiance, Persons condemns Barlow’s ‘dreadfull cruel positions’ of ‘Popes deposing Kings, exposing them to murder, incyting their subjects to rebellion, and determining such parricide to be meritorious’.²⁰⁶ Such an attempt to ‘hurt and prejudice [...] Catholicke men, and their cause’ is attributed to ‘THE FLATTERY AND SYCOPHANCY USED BY DIVERS MINISTERS TO HIS MAJESTY OF ENGLAND’.²⁰⁷

Taking both sides of the argument into account, we might ask to what extent, therefore, the representation of Jesuits in contemporary polemic *reflected* a reality or *created*

²⁰⁴ *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 314, 322, respectively. Edmund Campion stated categorically that he had no intention of intervening in political matters: ‘I Neuer had minde and I am straitly forbidden by our sayd Father that sent mee’, he wrote, ‘to deale in any respecte with matters of state or pollicy of this realme as thinges appertayning not to my vocation, and from which I doe gladly restrayne and sequester my thoughtes’, in *The great bragge and challenge of M. Champion a Jesuite co[m]monlye called Edmunde Campion, latelye arriued in Englande, contayninge nyne articles here seuerallye laide downe, directed by him to the lordes of the Counsaile* (London, 1581), p. 17. Arnold Pritchard points out that a Jesuit like William Weston was so intent on avoiding conflict that he was often perceived as being ‘annoying’ and ‘holier-than-thou’ for his acts of selflessness and humility (Pritchard, p. 81).

²⁰⁵ Höpfl, p. 323. See also *Royalists & Patriots*, in which Sommerville states that, for those who believed that an ‘act of papal deposition absolved subjects from their civil allegiance’, a ‘king who continued to exercise power after deposition was nothing more than a usurping tyrant, and could be assassinated by anyone’ (p. 185).

²⁰⁶ *A discussion of the answere of M. William Barlow, D. of Diuinity, to the booke intituled: The iudgment of a Catholike Englishman liuing in banishment for his religion &c. Concerning the apology of the new Oath of allegiance* (Saint-Omer, 1612), Sig. H4v. Published posthumously.

²⁰⁷ Persons, *A discussion of the answere of M. William Barlow*, Sig. F3r.

one. That writers were quite clearly traversing or shifting certain boundaries to put forward their respective positions, rather than operating within the confines of set perimeters, reflects Conal Condren's argument that 'much of what we inadvertently reclassify as political theory was pervasively casuistical' (and in some instances, we might add, equivocal).²⁰⁸ Did the Society generally view tyrannicide as a plausible course of action, in the same way that Chastel and Boucher had in France, or did they see it as an unnatural act of rebellion, in which case their rejection of Chastel would have been genuine?²⁰⁹ Modern historians have offered a variety of responses to this question, and it is not the purpose of this study, as one that is literary rather than historical, to attempt to contribute to the debate.²¹⁰ Instead, we shall examine how the image of the 'Evil Jesuit' that was deployed in literature created an 'us vs. them' culture and, consequently, a dichotomy between conformism and recusancy that could be used to overshadow, or even replace, the division between Catholicism and Protestantism. In renegotiating such boundaries, writers could influence the way that readers imagined themselves as political subjects whose allegiance could be distinguished from their religious conscience.

²⁰⁸ p. 173. In the light of Condren's argument, it is interesting to note that, as Butler points out, critics have begun to recognise that Person's effort to nurture the Jesuit mission to England 'was not simply a matter of doctrine or politics but of writing, one in which the struggle for souls (and by extension for more temporal allegiances) was carried out through books, pamphlets, and manuscripts that themselves display some concern with the nature of text and practices of reading' (p. 133). As Butler goes on to clarify, however, we must be alert to the idea that early modern thought would have been influenced by a variety of other factors that extended beyond literary culture ('Equivocation, Cognition, and Political Authority in Early Modern England', pp. 142-43).

²⁰⁹ For the latter view, see Höpfl, p. 330; and Nelson, pp.46-50.

²¹⁰ Questier argues that only 'in the crudest sense were the Jesuits an army of propagandists who might either succeed or fail in "signing up" large numbers of otherwise passive laymen' ("Like locusts over all the world", p. 269). Despite the common perception of the evil and seditious Jesuit, there were less political Jesuits who believed that the aim of the mission in England was not to convert the state or get involved in politics but rather to edify individual souls (Questier, "Like Locusts over all the World", p. 282). Arnold Pritchard, for instance, argues that the 'belief that the Jesuits were deeply implicated in political plotting against England was made plausible by the activities of several very prominent and visible Jesuits. The Appellants' arch-villain, Parsons, had been very involved in politics since the 1580s as a leader of the "activist" exiles and as a political propagandist'. Additionally, the Jesuits had gained control over many educational institutions including the seminary at Rome, which indicated their growing influence (Pritchard, p. 180). For a survey of the Jesuits' contribution to the political debates that signifies their importance in undermining the monarch's authority, see Thomas H. Clancy, S.J., *Papist Pamphleteer: The Allen-Persons Party and the Political Thought of the Counter-Reformation in England, 1572-1615* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964). Although Clancy does not seek to produce a dear-cut theory of the political thought of counter-Reformation England, this text provides a range of very useful sources (see particularly the 'Chronological List of Political Writings of the Allen-Persons Party: 1572-1613' in the Appendix, pp. 235-243).

Like many others who sought ostensibly to divide all subjects in England into two definitive, political categories, those who obey the law and those who break it, John Donne reinforces the division between Catholics and Jesuits: the Roman Church, he states in *Pseudo-Martyr*, is ‘the *Principall* and *most eminent*, and *exemplar member*’ of the Catholic Church, and yet the ‘beautie and integritie’ of this Church has been ‘defaced’ by the Society (sigs. Y2r; X4v; X1r, respectively).²¹¹ Stefania Tutino argues that, like those mentioned above, Donne uses ‘anti-Jesuitism as an argument to support the possibility of granting to the other Catholics a form of toleration’, and Marotti further states that to ‘some degree the Jesuits were, for Donne (and for most nationalistic English), an object of paranoid fantasizing’.²¹² Noticing, however, that Donne’s anti-Jesuitism differs in relation to many of his contemporaries, T. S. Healy argues persuasively that in *Ignatius His Conclave* ‘there are really only two major charges which are made again and again in different forms’ against the Society: these being ‘that the Jesuits are avid innovators and anti-monarchists’.²¹³ This evaluation could easily be applied to *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Biathanatos*, with some slight modification. Although both of these texts attack the doctrinal innovations of the Council of Trent and the anti-monarchism associated with the papal deposing power, Donne primarily criticises, what he considers to be, the tractability of the Society’s members who facilitate the power-hunger of General Superiors and the pope – greedy authorities who wish to gain dominion over the temporal and spiritual facets of the Christian kingdom. The Jesuits who, Donne argues, resist the state in political

²¹¹ The latter half of chapter IV deals particularly with the Jesuits’ corruption of the Roma Church (sigs. Y1v-Aa2r).

²¹² ‘Notes on Machiavelli and Ignatius Loyola’, p. 1316; ‘John Donne’s Conflicted Anti-Catholicism’, p. 376, respectively. For further discussion on Donne’s religious toleration or mild anti-Catholicism in *Pseudo-Martyr*, see Sommerville, ‘John Donne the Controversialist’, in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, pp. 73-95; Strier, ‘John Donne Awry and Squint’, p. 365; Charles Monroe Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (Humanities Press: New York, 1958), p. 201; and Battenhouse, pp. 217-48.

For arguments against, see Healy who states that ‘the standard critical comment about *Pseudo-Martyr*, that it is a charitable work filled with irenic sweetness, is something of an exaggeration’ and that ‘chapter iv in *Pseudo-Martyr* is as far from irenicism as anything in William Crashaw’ (Healey, p. xviii); and Lander who contends that it would be a mistake to conclude that *Pseudo-Martyr* is a ‘document of moderation’ based on ‘Donne’s decision to cite Catholic sources almost exclusively’, because the text’s ‘purpose, as in most polemic, is to isolate those who disagree, depicting them as fanatical extremists’ (Lander, p. 151).

²¹³ Healey, p. xxxvii.

matters under the guise of spiritual devotion, have compromised their spiritual welfare in being driven to pseudo-martyrdom out of blind, idolatrous obedience. In particular, Donne argues that by taking ‘a fourth Supernumerary vow’ which makes Jesuits ‘to be disposed at the Popes absolute will’ (sig. A4r), the Jesuits are cadavers or ‘Carcasses, as euill spirits haue assumed to walk about in’ (sig. X4v).²¹⁴ They are vessels that are possessed and controlled by the pope to expedite the latter’s desire to eradicate princes (sig. Ff2v). On this point, Donne does not necessarily target the Society in and of itself, but rather the idea that martyrdom is being misused as a guise for treason. Although the Society is singled out by Donne because, for this ‘hunger of false-Martyrdome’ which ‘goes ever together with blasphemy against Princes’ the ‘*Iesuites* more then any, inflame thereunto’ (sigs. Aa1v-Aa2r), his attack on the Order is best described as a case study that is used to advance an overarching argument against counter-Reformation militancy.

Pseudo-Martyr contends that even if a prince were considered a tyrant, he would still need to be obeyed; a point that reflects the Elizabethan attitude that a tyrant who succeeds the throne lawfully ‘must be passively obeyed and religiously endured as a scourge of God’.²¹⁵ In chapter III, Donne discusses ‘Titles of great excesse’ and states that ‘the farthest mischief, which by this excesse Princes could stray into, or subiects suffer, is a deuiation into Tyranny, and an ordinary vse of an extraordinary power and prerogatiue, and so making subiects slaues’ (sig. K4r). Annabel Patterson exclaims that it ‘is hard to believe that [Donne] intended

²¹⁴ ‘Rule 36 of the “Summearium Constitutionum” of the Regulae, p. 12’, Raspa explains, ‘stipulates that faithful Jesuits will obey Divine Providence in the orders of their superiors “ac si cadaver essent,” as if they were cadavers’ (ed., *Pseudo-Martyr*, p. 341). The vow made by Jesuits to the pope was commonly criticised by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, both before 1606 and after. As Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*, p. 113, notes:

Well before the Oath of Allegiance, it had become dear that conflicts between monarchical and papal interest had a particular relevance to English Jesuits, unique among the Catholic deris in having made vows of obedience to the pope; and both lay and ordained Catholics could find this a good reason to distrust the Jesuit.

²¹⁵ W. A. Armstrong, ‘The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant’, *The Review of English Studies*, 24, no. 93 (January 1948), pp. 19-35 (p. 19). Condren further argues that casuistry was the line separating those who believed that tyrants should be obeyed (pp. 190-91) and those who believed that a tyrant was a rebel, imitating the first rebel, Satan (Condren, pp. 199-205).

this to be reassuring!’ and consequently describes *Pseudo-Martyr* as a ‘*partly* obedient defense of obedience to the crown’.²¹⁶ Yet, as we have noted above, the defence of tyrants was not at all uncommon in early modern literature. James himself put forward such a defence, stating that, due to ‘their natural Allegiance’, ‘Subjects are bound to obey their Princes for conscience sake, whether they were good or wicked Princes’.²¹⁷ Donne presents a similar argument, and further states that since ‘Princes by their lawes worke onely upon the faculties and powers of the soule’, as opposed to the soul itself, they pose no danger to a subject’s spiritual welfare. The real danger, Donne goes on to state, is the ‘Bishoppes’ who ‘pretend a power upon the substance of our soules, which must be in their disposition, for her condition and state in the next life’. As representatives of religious, but manmade, institutions, these individuals ‘worke upon a more dangerous and corruptible subject, which is the Conscience’ and so ‘threaten greater penalties to any which doubt thereof, which is damnation’. For this reason, ‘popes cannot be so excuseable in this excesse as princes may be’ (sig. K4r).

Conceiving of Donne’s anti-Jesuitism within the context of counter-Reformation militancy demonstrates the interconnectedness of treason and pseudo-martyrdom within his religious and political thought. This dynamic is evident in the way that Donne situates the traitor within a binary opposition of true religion/false religion, whereby the pseudo-martyr and traitor are first aligned and then defined against true religion, which, for Donne, constitutes the ‘foundation’ of Christianity: the ‘Trinity of the persons’ (sig. F4v). That Donne sees the best defence of religious truth as being provided by the state, and that a monarch may not, therefore, be resisted unless s/he threatens to shake the foundation of Christianity, points to the syndetic relationship in Donne’s works between religious truth, conformity and the doubting conscience. These arguments, which I advanced in the first chapter, are complemented by a focus on Donne’s ideas regarding false religion, which

²¹⁶ Patterson, *Reading between the Lines*, pp. 188-90 (my emphasis).

²¹⁷ *Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus. Or An apologie for the Oath of allegiance* (London, 1607), sig. C3v.

Donne sees as being inextricably bound to the ideas of political disobedience and religious assurance: both of which are elements associated with counter-Reformation militancy and recusancy. Given that the components in a binary opposition are defined against each other, Donne's portrayal of those who threaten the state, and thus the foundation of Christianity, serves to reinforce Donne's position as a true conformist. The binary opposition which I identify in Donne's thought is encapsulated in the following quotation from *Pseudo-Martyr*, which posits the dominant value of true religion alongside its antipode:

But this mission from *Rome*, is not to Preach *Christ*, but his *Vicar*: Not his kingdome of *Grace*, or *Glorie*, but his title to Temporall kingdomes: Not how hee shall iudge quicke and dead at his second comming, but how his Vicar shall inquire, Examine, Syndicate, Sentence, Depose: yea, Murder Princes on earth: Not Christ crucified, languishing for vs vnder Thorns, Nayles, Whippes & Speares, but his Vicar enthron'd, and wantonly groning vnder the waight of his Keyes, and Swords, and Crownes.
(sigs. Aa3r-Aa3v)

At the centre of Donne's anti-Jesuitism is a charge against the Society for being the most power-hungry and oppressive force within society, one that desires to replace all governing bodies with a Jesuit pope, who would have infinite power over both church and state. For Donne, the church militancy practiced by the Society, which supposedly entails false worship of superiors and the endorsement of tyrannicide, is a breeding ground for sedition and pseudo-martyrdom.

With this view in mind, and in order to understand Donne's position more fully, it is vital to recognise the intertextual nature of *Pseudo-Martyr*, which was written with a keen eye both for the English and European polemics around martyrdom/pseudo-martyrdom, religious conscience and the roles of spiritual and temporal power. Questions of recusancy and conformism were central to these polemics, and an examination of their contemporary literary representations allows us to better situate Donne's arguments on these themes. Since Donne sought to portray a conformist/recusant binary—in which Jesuit recusants (as opposed to Catholics) could be associated with church militancy, false religion and pseudo-

martyrdom—in place of a Protestant/Catholic opposition, the broader debates to which Donne contributed and responded are essential to our understanding of his religious and political thought. It is therefore to this wider context that we now turn.

II

The representation of recusants as ‘seditious fellows who use religion as a pretext for undermining the authority of the King, the Queen, and the Church’, D. M. Loades writes, was the default position for those defending the Jacobean oath of allegiance.²¹⁸ Though the different Catholic camps (loyalist, partial conformist, recusant) were each defending their claim to true faith, the dichotomy between uncompromising recusancy and uncompromising conformity put pressure on individuals to fall into one of the two categories as either a loyalist or traitor (or, from the recusant perspective, as either a heretic or a defender of the true faith): the disparity between these two extremes could not be reconciled. Thus, disagreements between co-religionists about what was expected of a good Catholic could, ostensibly, cause Catholicism to crumble from within. As Michael Questier has argued, to general assent, the oath was a ‘diabolically effective polemical cocktail’, which ‘should be understood as an exceptionally subtle and well-constructed rhetorical essay in the exercise of state power’, and ‘possibly the most lethal measure against Romish dissent ever to reach the statute book’.²¹⁹

When the oath passed into law in 1606, James VI&I claimed that his sole intention was to separate loyal and treacherous subjects: the oath was, he explained, ‘an acte of great favour and clemencie towards so many of our subjects, who, though blinded with the superstition of poperie, yet carr[ie] a dutifull heart towards our obedience’. As such, James condemned the pope’s breves, which had banned the taking of the oath, as a ‘malitious tricke’ that even ‘the devil could not have devised’, a ploy to sow ‘new seedes of jealousie betweene his Majestie and his Popish Subjects’, thus throwing them ‘needlesly into one of these

²¹⁸ D. M. Loades, *The Oxford Martyrs* (Batsford, 1970), p. 159.

²¹⁹ ‘Loyalty, Religion and State Power in Early Modern England: English Romanism and the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance’, *The Historical Journal*, 40, no. 2 (June 1997), pp. 311-29 (pp. 311-13).

desperate straights, Either with the losse of their lives and goods' or else to 'procure the condemnation of their soules'.²²⁰ The main point of contention regarding the oath, was the clause compelling Catholic subjects to denounce the papal deposing power. Although this clause did not deny the pope's power to tend to the spiritual welfare of Catholics everywhere, it did revoke his right to employ military power, whether directly or indirectly, against the king and country.²²¹

The response from Rome was put forward by Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), an Italian Jesuit and Cardinal of the Catholic Church who participated in the oath controversy under the alias of Matthaeus Tortus, and who produced a damaging theological attack on the oath by endorsing the doctrine of the *potestas indirecta* (the indirect power of the pope in temporal matters).²²² This theory, which was advocated by many Catholic theologians, both English and Continental, had a substantial influence during the pamphlet war.²²³ In making a claim for the pope's supremacy, Bellarmine contended that the monarch derives his power by transference through the people, rather than immediately from God. Although tyrannicide is not presented as a natural consequence of the *potestas indirecta*, the two notions became interconnected polemically as a result of those who aimed to discredit Bellarmine in presenting him as a danger to the English state. In Lancelot Andrewes's 1610 Gowrie sermon, for example, the English bishop makes an explicit connection between deposition and king-killing, in which papal claims to authority over the king are parodied: "The *Pope*, he

²²⁰ *Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus*, sigs. A2v-A3r; Michael Questier, 'Catholic Loyalism', pp. 4-5.

²²¹ Houliston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit Polemic, 1580-1610* (Aldershot: Ashgate and Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 2007), pp. 143-44.

²²² Sommerville provides a translation from Bellarmine's *De potestate summi pontificis*, in *Opera omnia* (Naples, 1856-62) IV, pt 2, p. 295, in which Bellarmine explains that although the pope only has spiritual power this power can be used to influence temporal matters: "By divine right", said Cardinal Bellarmine, "the power attributed to Christ's Vicar is not properly temporal, but extends to temporal things" (*Royalists & Patriots*, p. 183).

²²³ Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots*, p. 184; Stefania Tutino, *Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2010), particularly chaps 1 and 5. See also Condren, p. 189, who argues that 'the disputes about whether papal power was direct or indirect, spiritual or partially temporal [...] left English Jesuits horribly exposed from the last years of Elizabeth's reign'. With Condren's argument in mind, one might deduce why it was necessary for the Jesuits to push one line of argument quite forcefully during the pamphlet war.

was *Gods*, and they [kings] were *his* [the pope's] *anoointed*, and of him had their *dependence*, and he to *depose* them and to *dispose* of them'.²²⁴ Peter McCullough notes that the 'aural play on "*depose*" and "*dispose*" is funny, but deadly funny'; it epitomises 'the twin papal claims to be able to excommunicate and dethrone kings, and then to endorse the killing of them'.²²⁵ For James and his loyalist subjects, the elimination of the papal deposing power was thus a crucial step in safeguarding the state from the threat (practical or theoretical) of tyrannicide. Since, as Eric Nelson argues, the 'inviolability of the monarch's person as established in law was a foundation stone on which political stability rested', the 'promotion of the alternative theory, that it was licit to kill some tyrannical princes, undermined the stability of the whole political system'.²²⁶

The basic stance of Jesuits such as Bellarmine and Robert Persons towards the oath, was that it was 'an assault on the Catholic conscience, that to deny the papal deposing power was to leave the Church unprotected from tyranny, and that it was of no practical benefit to the state'.²²⁷ Despite Persons's public attack on those who implied or argued that the papal deposing power was inextricably bound to the theory or practice of tyrannicide (*A discussion of the answere of M. William Barlow*, sig. H4v), John Bossy has provided some evidence to show that Persons may have, earlier, been involved in a proposal to assassinate Elizabeth I. Bossy's argument is based on the translation of a letter sent from Persons to Claudio Acquaviva, the fifth Superior General of the Society, in which it appears that Persons is agitating on behalf of George Gifford, a 'disgruntled' gentleman who regarded the Queen as the only real obstacle to the success of the mission.²²⁸ The evidence provided by Bossy is by no means

²²⁴ *Lancelot Andrenes: Selected Sermons*, p. 185. Cf. Persons, *A discussion of the answere of M. William Barlow*, sig. N4v, in which Persons questions whether the Bishop of Rome 'by Catholike doctrine may at his pleasure by that Pastorall power of his, *depose Princes*, and *dispose of their Kingdomes* at his pleasure' (my emphasis).

²²⁵ *Lancelot Andrenes: Selected Sermons*, p. xliii.

²²⁶ p. 44.

²²⁷ Houliston, *Catholic Resistance*, p. 144.

²²⁸ John Bossy, 'The Heart of Robert Persons', in *The Reckoned Expense*, ed. by McCoog, pp. 141-58 (p. 150). Flynn also cites a letter from Heywood to Acquaviva, commenting that the former 'criticized a whole list of Person's real or supposed decisions as Superior in England, the most lurid criticism being Heywood's charge

conclusive, since the letter is no longer extant, but the study is a reminder that the distinction between the Society and tyrannicide theory is not always clear-cut.²²⁹

What set Persons and some of his friends apart from others was that when the mid-Elizabethan regime in some sense moved in a legitimist direction after disposing of Mary Stuart, Persons did not, and instead deployed the style of political thought associated with the Holy League to contest the accession of James VI&I.²³⁰ In his 1594 text *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England*, Persons, under the pseudonym of Doleman, argues that the commonwealth has the power to depose the monarch and elect a successor. This text, reprinted as a republican text in the late 1640s as *Severall speeches delivered at a conference concerning the power of Parliament*, presents the notion of a contract between ruler and subject, and argues that a monarch is expected to ‘rule and govern justly, according to law, conscience, equity, and religion’. Should that authority

fayle, or wilfully decline, casting behind them all respect of obligation and duty, to the end for which they were made Princes, and advanced in dignity above the rest; then is the Common wealth not only free from all Oaths made of obedience or allegiance to such unworthy Princes, but is bound moreover for saving the whole body, to resist, chasten, & remove such evill heads if she be able, for otherwise all would come to destruction, ruine, and publike desolation.²³¹

The double entendre of removing ‘evill heads’ hints that a tyrant should be dethroned by execution, presenting tyrannicide as a logical consequence of deposition and suggesting the ultimate cleansing of a corrupt body politic. More explicitly, Persons argues that subjects should use a king’s sword ‘against him, who gave it them, for the publique good if need so

that Persons had conspired with one George Gifford to assassinate Queen Elizabeth’. See Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 137.

²²⁹ A further example is that of Juan de Mariana (1536-1624), a Spanish Jesuit priest and monarchomach, who argued overtly for the legitimacy of tyrannicide in *De rege et Regis institutione* (1598). The Society did, however, make a point of publicly opposing Mariana. For a brief discussion on the topic, see Tutino, *Empire of Souls*, pp. 165-66.

²³⁰ Both Persons and William Allen were heavily implicated in the rise of the League in France, even if they were not, presumably, members in any formal sense. For discussions on the matter, see Houliston, *Catholic Resistance*, pp. 4-7; and Maurice Whitehead, *English Jesuit Education: Expulsion, Suppression, Survival, Restoration, 1762-1803* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 18-19.

²³¹ (London, 1648; Wing P573), p. 18.

require', and even goes so far as to suggest that good kings themselves endorse tyrannicide.²³² This text, together with Bossy's argument, must alert the modern reader to the possibility that false perceptions of the Society may have been fabricated not just in a derogatory way by royalists but also in an idealistic way by Jesuits. The ongoing debate in modern scholarship about whether or not Doleman was indeed Persons's pseudonym, highlights the extent to which identity could be hidden, obscured or manipulated in controversial literature of the time.²³³

With the uncertainty surrounding the Jesuits' views on tyrannicide, as well as the insistence of such Jesuit missionaries as Persons and Campion on uncompromising recusancy, it not surprising that the state demanded uncompromising conformity on the matter of the deposing power. The dichotomy between recusancy and conformity created the illusion of a political vacuum where the 'middle ground' Catholics resided, and such individuals, if they did not choose a camp for themselves, were often forced into one or the other category via literary representation. For example, when in 1607 the Roman Catholic priest Robert Drury was found guilty of high treason and was executed at Tyburn as a result, an anonymous author produced *A True Report of the Araignment, tryall, conviction, and condemnation, of a Popish Priest, named Robert Drenrie*, which censured Drury's refusal of the oath as 'traytorous' in the light of the 'extraordinary great grace and mercie offered him'.²³⁴

²³² See Persons, *Severall speeches*, p. 28. For a discussion of the spiritual and temporal swords, an image derived from the Galatian 'two swords' doctrine of the fifth century, and its relation to the authority of the monarch and the pope, see Condren, pp. 273-76.

²³³ For those who argue, most convincingly, that Persons was the sole author of the text see W. Camden, *History of Renowned Victorious Princess Elizabeth* (London, 1675), p. 482; C. Butler, *Historical memoirs of English, Irish and Scottish Catholics*, 4 vols (London, 1822), II, p. 23; C. H. Mdlwain, *The political works of James I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918); Peter Holmes, 'The Authorship and Early Reception of a Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England', *The Historical Journal*, 23, no. 2 (June 1980), 415-429. For those who believe that Persons co-authored the book with William Allen and Sir Francis Englefield see T. G. Law, *The Archpriest controversy*, 2 vols (Camden Society (1896-8), II, pp. 52, 64, 71, 108, 115, 132, 221; E. L. Taunton, *The history of the Jesuits in England* (London: [n.pub.], 1901), p. 150. For a rather more tenuous argument against Persons's authorship, see Nina Green, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England* (Published online at <<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/>> 2012) [accessed 3 December 2014].

²³⁴ anon., *A true report of the arraignment, tryall, conviction, and condemnation, of a popish priest, named Robert Drenrie at the Sessions house in the old Baylie, on Friday and Wednesday, the 20. and 24. of February: the extraordinary great grace and mercie offered him, and his stubborne, traytorous, and wilfull refusall. Also the tryall and death of Humphrey Lloyd, for maliciouslie*

Drury, who had sided with the Appellants in the Archpriest Controversy, and who had signed a protestation of allegiance to Elizabeth I in 1603, refused the Jacobean oath of allegiance on the basis that he was unwilling to deny the papal deposing power.²³⁵ Considering his signing of the 1603 protestation, it is likely that Drury considered the topic of the pope's jurisdiction to be a spiritual matter that could not be renegotiated without the risk of heresy. The Drury case, and indeed others in the early Jacobean period, are complex since Drury (like Thomas Garnet, in 1608) was prepared to take the oath or something like it under certain circumstances—in Drury's case it would have to have been in private—or, rather, this is what some reports suggest.²³⁶ There were even Catholics who attempted to compose different versions of the oath which 'omitted the offending aspects of it'.²³⁷ It is crucial to note, however, that just as Drury and Garnet's requests were denied, so many of these modified versions were rejected by the state, and that, in some instances, the individual making the proposition was executed as a traitor.²³⁸ Todd Butler explains that a key reason that 'the words of suspected priests such as Garnet could simply not be trusted' was due to the Catholic defence of equivocation which stated that 'a Catholic might equivocate only when faced with a court without the proper jurisdiction or an examiner without the proper authority'. This posed a problem for Protestants since 'a genuine acknowledgement of the king's supremacy in matters both civil and ecclesiastical' was assumed or implied to be absent.²³⁹

murdering one of the Guard. And lastly the execution of the said Robert Drury, drawne in his priestly habit, and as he was a Benedictine fryer, on Thursdaie following to Tiborne, where he was hanged and quartered (London: Printed for Jeffrie Chorlton, 1607; STC 7261), sig. A2r.

²³⁵ It is alleged that Drury's decision to refuse the oath was influenced by the Jesuits and that he had been admitted to the Society of Jesus two days before his martyrdom: Peter Holmes, 'Drury, Robert (1567–1607)', *DNB* [accessed 12 Dec 2016].

²³⁶ Questier, 'Catholic Loyatism', pp. 1146–47.

²³⁷ Questier, 'Catholic Loyatism', p. 1153.

²³⁸ Questier, 'Catholic Loyatism', pp. 1153–57.

²³⁹ 'Equivocation, Cognition, and Political Authority', p. 138. Houliston has further demonstrated that Persons actually ridiculed the state's attempt to 'make assurance doubly sure by requiring the oath-taker to forswear equivocation', based on the logic that if authorities 'were afraid of equivocators, there was no way of securing them' (*Catholic Resistance*, p. 145).

As such, the *True Report of the Araignment* comments that in the matter of Drury's refusal of the oath, 'Religion is the Cloake cast ouer intended treason, and holy protestations hide hollow harted practises, more deuillish then (in plaine meaning) can easily be doubted, and far more dangerous, then weake capacities are able to discouer'.²⁴⁰ In contrast to the Protestant martyr who is depicted, particularly in *Acts and Monuments*, as being calm and joyous in the face of death with a confident assurance of true religion,²⁴¹ Drury is presented in the state's account of his execution as a coward in the moments before he died:

Hee confessed himselfe to be a Romaine Catholick, and a Priest, and desired all Romaine Catholickes to praye with him, and for him. And often looking about him, as hopinge there was some mercy for him, for feare appeared very plainely in him, when he felt the Cart to goe vnder him, and his expectation to be deceiued, he caught fast holde with his left hande on the alter aboue hys head, and very hardly was inforced to let it goe, but held so for a pretty while. If this were not an aparant hope of life, I refer it to better Iudgements then mine owne. He hung til he was quite dead, and afterward his body was quartered.²⁴²

This account of a man afraid to die, which implies a lack of confident assurance, inverts the common convention of religious certainty found in early modern martyrologies. As such, this passage is not just a narrative but a *counter*-narrative, with implications that can only be understood if defined against the lexicon of martyrdom: it aims to reinforce Drury's guilt as a traitor by portraying him as a pseudo-martyr.

This convention of inverting religious acts to examples of secular rebellion, and vice versa, can also be found in the accounts of Henry Garnet (1555-1606) and the execution he suffered as a consequence for his role in the Gunpowder Plot. Garnet's death generated a lot of publicity from both sides involved in the pamphlet war due to the story of the straw, an ear of corn on which a drop of Garnet's blood fell at his execution, and on which an

²⁴⁰ anon., *A true report*, sig. C4v.

²⁴¹ See Monta, pp. 162-63.

²⁴² anon., *A true report*, D3v-D4r.

image of Garnet's face was said to have appeared miraculously a few days later.²⁴³ The straw was kept by Catholics as a relic, and, despite Garnet's attempt to discourage the use of violence against the king, it was used by some to show that resisting the English state was the work of a martyr. The miracle that proceeded from Garnet's execution is detailed in an anonymous Jesuit's account thus:

his heade appeared in that livelye coulour, as yt seemed to retaine the same hewe, and shewe, of liefew^{ch} yt had before yt was cut of, soe as both heretiques and Catholiques were astonished thereat, and so much the more, in that, according to custome beinge cast into hoate water yt receaved no alteration at all: as neither yt did after yt was placed upon London bridge, and sett upp there upon a pole. Whereupon there was such resorte of people for the space of sixe weekes as yt was admirable, the citizens flockinge thither by hundreds to see soe strange and wonderfull a spectacle, as the head of this glorious Martyr [...].

After attracting a crowd of '400 or 500 persons', the magistrates of the city turned the face upward so that it could no longer be viewed, and,

When as his face was thus turned, he then appeared miraculously in the eare of a cornew^{ch} was stayned wth his blood, and taken upp by one whose purposelie came to the place where he was executed, intendinge to dippe some handkercheffe [...] in his blood [...].

Following this,

three persons sawe distinctlye a face of a man in glorious manner, hauinge wth all proportions most Exactelye, bearde, mouthe, eies, foreheade, and upon his heade a crowne, a crosse in the foreheade and a starre, and in the lower parte of his face, as the chinne a Cherub.²⁴⁴

On the Continent the image of Garnet became known as the 'Spica Jesuitica', and it was used as 'a touchstone for Tridentine piety and anti-Stuart propaganda, with iconic engravings of the item circulating for sale in Cologne, The Hague, and Rome'.²⁴⁵ The author of the above account warns that the 'heretickes especiallie Byshopps and Ministers doe attribute this

²⁴³ See Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 134-36.

²⁴⁴ 'Papers relating to the English Jesuits', BL MS Add. 21203, Plut. dii.F.

²⁴⁵ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 243.

worke of god to witchcrafte'.²⁴⁶ The fact that this pro-Jesuit source is written in English rather than in Latin, hinting at the intended reader, suggests an anxiety that the English nation, without an alternative account, could be swayed by the state's said heresy.

Those writing in support of the state did indeed excoriate the story of 'Garnet's straw' to counter the claim that a rebel could be viewed as a martyr. In Thomas Coryat's 1611 travelogue *Coryat's Crudities: Hastily gobled up in Five Moneth's Travels*, the story is 'ranked amongst the merry tales of Poggius the Florentine';²⁴⁷ and in Robert Pricket's 1607 *The Jesuit Miracles, or New Popish Wonders* Garnet is considered to be among the 'helborne Climbers' that consist of false martyrs:

Great Brittons Ile, when on her fruitfull brest,
Hell breathed forth corruptions poysoned slime,
And bloudy Romes adherents did their best.
To make their hellish hopes aloft to clime:
When at their top of height heauen them so cheks
That helborne Climers breake their traytrous necks.²⁴⁸

As with the state's account of Drury, the intermingling of secular terminology ('traytrous') and religious terminology ('helborne') is used to portray Garnet simultaneously a traitor and pseudo-martyr, thus presenting his supposed acts of sedition as the antipathy of true religion. For Pricket, the story of Garnet's straw is a vicious lie that is used 'To force beliefe, by falshoods forsworne prate' in an attempt to 'boldly wrong, both Prince and State'.²⁴⁹ Garnet, the poem implies, is not a martyr but a false idol:

Garnet their Martyr, whom they please to paint,
Him onely for a painted martyr take,
He was euen such a martyr, as a Saint.
Such Saints, and Martyrs, Popes haue power to make:
He dies no Saint, whose death maintaines a lie,
Nor are they Martyrs, that for treason die.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ BL MS Add. 21203.

²⁴⁷ *Coryat's crudities; reprinted from the edition of 1611: with his letters from India, &c.*, 3 vols (London, 1776), I, p. 53.

²⁴⁸ Robert Pricket, *The Iesuits miracles, or new popish wonders Containing the straw, the crowne, and the nondrous child, with the confutation of them and their follies* (London, 1607), sig. A4r.

²⁴⁹ Pricket, sig. B2v.

²⁵⁰ Pricket, sig. B3r.

This stanza refers to the Catholic image of the corn that was circulating on the Continent, which Pricket reproduces on the title-page of his work. Because of the cherub's face that appears on Garnet's chin in the image, the image itself was ridiculed by Protestants for representing the Jesuit as two-faced and equivocal:

Rightly to paint the painter well knew how,
 For Garnet had two faces in one hood:
 Equiuocation his double face did cloake,
 Equiuocating himselfe at last did choake.²⁵¹

With references to the Gunpowder Plot, the oath of allegiance and the Jesuit mission, the poem suggests that the pope corrupts Jesuits with promises of martyrdom as a part of a ploy to increase his own power in temporal matters. The danger of the Jesuit, Pricket advises, lies not simply in his attempt to affect the individual, but in his desire to convert the state. Propaganda such as Pricket's poem contributed to the perception of the 'Evil Jesuit', which used the language of pseudo-martyrdom to define the traitor.

III

Placing Donne within this contemporary milieu of polemical anti-Jesuitism and the broader questions about conformism and recusancy points to the ways in which he both echoed common arguments and literary representations, and renegotiated or appropriated some of these existing conventions to serve a different end. The specific basis of his conformism, which was rooted in an absolutist politics that allowed the possibility of realising true religion, meant that he sought to construct as wide a conformist camp as possible, and to dissuade from the path of pseudo-martyrdom any of those who might have been seduced by political disobedience or religious assurance prompted by manmade, and therefore possibly heretical, institutions. This provides part of the reason as to why Donne attempted to displace the Catholic/Protestant binary and overlay it with a recusant/conformist opposition that disentangled a subject's political stance from his or her religious conscience, and which

²⁵¹ Pricket, B3r.

therefore presented the latter as being of little interest to the state. Donne's use of the trope of the 'Evil Jesuit' is an example of his attack on nonconformism, one that could just as easily be demonstrated by his criticism of either the Protestant left or the Puritan nonconformist, whom he portrays as equally seditious.²⁵² Yet, just as the Jesuits provide the best example for Donne because they 'exceed all others, in their Constitutions and practise, in all those points, which beget or cherish this corrupt desire of false-Martyrdome' (*PM*, sig. V2r), so they provide the best example for our purpose because Donne's satirical treatment of them exceeds his treatment of all others. It is noteworthy that his preordination prose focuses primarily on the specificities of Jesuit teaching, which he believed threatened the state and true religion through the advocacy of pseudo-martyrdom and church militancy. Such an approach made the stereotypical practices of the Society, as opposed to individual Jesuits, the predominant focus of his absolutist argument.

Thus, in comparison to contemporary literature, Donne's attack on the Society is remarkably impersonal. He barely refers, for instance, to either the Gunpowder Plot or the execution of Henry Garnet, which is particularly noticeable considering that both of these incidents generated a lot of publicity, and that the Garnet phenomenon demonstrated the type of 'mis-devotion' that Donne's speaker in 'The Relic' (1608-1613?) associates with religious artefacts and miracles.²⁵³ Further, Anthony Raspa comments on *Pseudo-Martyr's* unusual silence on the Jesuit innocent, Robert Southwell – an observation that is both noted and echoed by Susannah Brietz Monta who explains that, instead of criticising Southwell himself, 'Donne attacks with bitter precision the theological points Southwell helped to popularize'.²⁵⁴ Most strikingly, however, Donne only ever mentions Robert Persons

²⁵² For an excellent discussion on the topic, see Marotti, 'John Donne's Conflicted Anti-Catholicism', pp. 358-79. Marotti's argument has significantly influenced the present chapter section.

²⁵³ Donne only makes one passing and indirect reference to Garnet in chapter VI to ridicule the special vow of obedience that Jesuits swear to the pope (sig. Ff2r), and a brief comment associating the Jesuits with gunpowder (sigs. Y4r-Y4v).

²⁵⁴ Raspa, pp. xlv-xlv; Monta, p. 138, respectively.

intermittently.²⁵⁵ It is, in fact, very probable that Donne produced *Pseudo-Martyr* in order to improve upon William Barlow's poorly argued defence of the Jacobean oath, *An Answer to a Catholike English-man*, 1609, which had launched a personal attack on Persons.²⁵⁶ In a letter to his good friend Sir Henry Goodere, written in 1609 while preparing *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne explains why Barlow's defence is not just unsatisfactory but also damaging to the king's case for conformity:

I will adventure to say to you, without inserting one unnecessary word, that the Book is full of falsifications in words, and in sense, and of falsehoods in matter of fact, and of inconsequent and unscholarlike arguings, and of relinquishing the King, in many points of defence, and of contradiction of himself, and of dangerous and suspected Doctrine in Divinitie, and of silly ridiculous triflings, and of extreme flatteries, and of neglecting better and more obvious answers [...].²⁵⁷

This description sums up Barlow's text excellently. The 'unscholarlike arguings' and 'silly ridiculous triflings' refer to Barlow's petulance in presenting a personal attack on Robert Persons rather than a convincing defence of the oath.

For instance, after Barlow dismisses those 'personall Calumnies' directed at him by Persons, stating that such a personal attack will draw nothing from him but 'silence', he ironically descends into a bout of name-calling and insults. In the 'Epistle Dedicatorie' Persons is described as a 'Rake-shame' 'whose verie name is the Epitome of all Contumelie', and—amidst many other invectives—is also referred to as 'this Rabshekah', Rabshekah being a messenger in the Old Testament sent by the king of Assyria to speak out against Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah.²⁵⁸ Having refused to speak in Syrian in 2 Kings 18:27, stating that 'the people on the wall' (i.e. the Jewish people) will 'eat their own dung, and drink their own piss', Rabshekah delivers a vituperative speech in Hebrew in an attempt to turn the

²⁵⁵ Houliston, 'Apology', pp. 476-77.

²⁵⁶ For those in agreement, see Bald, pp. 202-12; and John Stubbs *Donne: The Reformed Soul* (Viking: London, 2006), pp. 250-51. Annabel Patterson, on the other hand, writes that 'Donne had entered the controversy over the Oath of Allegiance at the urging of Thomas Morton, which may have been seconded by James himself' (*Reading between the Lines*, p. 187).

²⁵⁷ Donne, *Letters*, p. 163.

²⁵⁸ *An answer to a Catholike English-man* (London, 1609; STC 1446), pp. 5-8.

Jewish people against the king of Judah and win their allegiance. Showing obedience to their king, however, the people hold their peace and refuse to answer, 'for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not' (2 Kings 18:36). By comparing Persons to Rabshekah, Barlow presents the Jesuit as a blasphemous enemy who attempts (and fails) to sway the allegiance of a loyal Hebrew nation. It was common for English monarchs to be compared to Hezekiah, a king who always 'did that which was right in the sight of the Lord' (2 Kings 18:3), and Barlow's comparison is intended as flattery to a king who believed that he represented the true Christian Israel.

Donne generally avoids such 'unscholarlike arguings' and flattery. In fact, for Donne, Barlow is almost as bad as his Jesuit opponents, being one of the 'Advocates, that though they be feed by the way, with Dignities, and other recompenses, yet that for which they plead is none of theirs. They write for Religion, without it'.²⁵⁹ Being careful to distinguish his work from Barlow's, Donne asks in the 'Preface' to *Pseudo-Martyr* to be excused if he 'shold seeme to any to haue intruded and vsurped the office of others, in writing of Diuinity and spirituall points, hauing no ordinary calling to that function' and claims that he 'need[s] no such *Advocates*, nor *Apologizers*; for it is not of Diuinity, but meere of temporall matters, that I write'. With his focus on the state rather than the church, Donne anticipates that his work may be misinterpreted as 'Flattery to the present State' or 'to get Occasion hereby'. 'I haue no other shelter against these imputations,' he declares, 'but an appeale to our blessed Sauour, and a protestation before his face, that my principall and direct scope and purpose herein, is the vnity and peace of his Church' (sig. B2v-B3v).²⁶⁰ In fact, a significant difference between Donne's and Barlow's defence of the oath is that the latter gives way to hyperbolic

²⁵⁹ Donne, *Letters*, p. 160.

²⁶⁰ Annabel Patterson notes that Donne's dislike of Barlow was sparked by the latter's endorsement of the execution of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex (1566-1601). Having joined the expedition against Cadiz in 1596, Donne was a great admirer of Devereux who had led the voyage. In his satirical work *The Courtier's Library*, Donne includes an item entitled 'An Encomion on Doctor Shaw, Chaplain to Richard III, by Doctor Barlow', which portrays Barlow as a sycophant ('All Donne', p. 47).

flattery, while the former does not. Donne's more temperate approach would have been agreeable to a king that had himself 'made the case that a monarch should avoid flatterers and promote useful subjects', having disparaged 'that filthie vice of Flatterie' in his *Basilikon Doron*.²⁶¹

Yet, Donne's very particular treatment of the Jesuits is often attributed, in psychosocial or psychobiographical studies, to his childhood, being viewed primarily as a corrective response to a family history of recalcitrance, with particular reference to his uncle, Jasper Heywood, who headed the Jesuit mission to England in 1581. 'Because of his family connections', claims John Carey, 'Donne was dragged into the very centre of the storm, and was forced to watch its bloody course with the closest attention', the implication being that from a young age the writer was left with a 'personal grudge'.²⁶² This 'personal grudge', for those who accept it, has been interpreted in one of two ways depending on whether Donne is believed to have viewed his family as the persecutors or as the persecuted. For John Stubbs, Donne 'blamed the militants of the Roman Church', including Jasper Heywood, 'for inciting people such as his brother to commit criminal acts'.²⁶³ For Jonathan F. S. Post, however, it is apparent in Donne's works that the writer 'identified deeply with [his] family history of persecution'.²⁶⁴ From either angle, it can be argued that Donne's attack on the Jesuits is directly relevant to his views on martyrdom, suffering and persecution. The tendency to read Donne's portrayal of the Society autobiographically, however, often leads to the presentation of his anti-Jesuitism as a sentiment harbouring some sense of the author's guilt, rather than as a literary device used to advance a larger argument against counter-Reformation militancy.

²⁶¹ Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, pp. 185-86.

²⁶² pp. 19-21.

²⁶³ p. 252. Henry had been arrested for harbouring a Catholic priest (1593), and was imprisoned at Newgate where he died shortly after.

²⁶⁴ Jonathan F. S. Post, 'Donne's life: a sketch', in *Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. by Guibbory, pp. 1-22 (p. 2).

M. Thomas Hester, for example, interprets ‘Elegy I: The Bracelet’²⁶⁵ as an expression of Donne’s shame over the ‘betrayal’ of his Catholic heritage. Assuming that the speaker and the poet share a voice, he puts forward the theory that

The passion at the end of the poem may well convey [...] Donne’s sense of self-betrayal and, as he phrased it, the “shame” and “feare” that he had betrayed his family and God. Thus, he might have felt some guilt as the survivor of the religious war that had recently claimed his younger brother Henry, the lay priest William Harrington, and other priests such as Robert Southwell, i.e. those men whose fate is wryly recalled in his description of his martyred “angels,” as well as those other Jesuit Fathers who had been secretly slipped into England – Persons, Campion, Heywood, Weston, Gerard, Garnet, Oldcome, Curry, Holtby, and Walpole: *Twelve Righteous Angels* by 1583.²⁶⁶

This analysis, however, seems to forget the humour of the poem, whereby the early modern trope of punning on the term ‘angel’ is used to signify both the martyr (or pseudo-martyr) and the English gold coin that was circulating during Elizabeth’s reign.²⁶⁷ Since these angels represent martyrs *and* money, it is difficult to take seriously the speaker’s guilt about betraying them unto the fire. Contemplating whether or not he should sacrifice his ‘twelve righteous Angels’ in order to replace the lady’s lost bracelet, the speaker wonders if these ‘innocents’ should bear the great burden of his sins (ll. 9; 17): ‘Shall they be damn’d’, he asks, ‘and in the furnace throwne | And punisht for offenses, not their owne’ (ll. 19-20)? As above, Hester takes the twelve angels of the poem to be ‘the secular successors of the Apostles, the Jesuit priesthood’, and this interpretation is particularly persuasive when ‘The Bracelet’ is read alongside *Pseudo-Martyr*.²⁶⁸ The parallels that emerge when comparing these two works, however, suggest an understanding of the ‘angels’ that is quite contrary to that proposed by Hester. Indeed, just as the Jesuits of *Pseudo-Martyr* are led by a blind obedience to the pope and so have become ‘Carcasses, as euill spirits haue assumed to walk about in’ (sig. X4v), so

²⁶⁵ The dating of this poem is unclear, although most agree that it must have been written between 1593 and 1599. For fuller details, see Donne, *Variorum*, ed. by Stringer and Parrish, pp. 513-14. All references to ‘The Bracelet’ are to this edition.

²⁶⁶ M. Thomas Hester, ‘The “Bitter Cost” of Donne’s “The Bracelet”’, *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 22, no. 1 (2015), 119-28 (p. 125).

²⁶⁷ Donne, *Variorum*, ed. by Stringer and Parrish, p. 523.

²⁶⁸ p. 121

the angels of the poem are to be exploited by the speaker as instruments that ‘should do good works and should prouide | Necessityes, but now must nource [the lady’s] pride’ (ll. 73-74). That the Jesuits and/or angels are misled and corrupted by outside forces appears in both works to be a fault of their own; despite being ‘righteous’, their blind obedience means that their futile and sinful sacrifices are nothing more than pseudo-martyrdoms. As the speaker of the poem comments, ‘They saue not me, they do not ease my paynes | When in that hell they’re burn’d and tyed in chaynes’ (ll. 21-22).

The value that the speaker places on the angels is also called into question when he informs the addressee that heaven has commanded these angels

[...] to prouide
All things to me, and be my faythfull guide
To gayne new friends, to’appease great enemyes
To comfort my Soule when I ly or rise [...]
(ll. 13-16)

The comical pun undermines the sacrifices made by the poem’s ‘martyrs’, first by implying that the spiritual comfort provided by angels is akin to the material comfort bought by money, and, second, by comparing their transformation at the point of their martyrdom with the change of one type of gold (coins) into another (a bracelet) (ll. 69-78). Furthermore, Hester’s contention that ‘The Bracelet’ expresses Donne’s ‘fearful shame that he had betrayed those angelic “messengers” and faithful Catholic witnesses of his family tradition’ must be treated with caution since the argument is given on tenuous ground. In referencing a letter written by Donne to Sir Henry Goodere in which the poet comments that, ‘to my satyrs there belongs some fear and to some elegies and these perhaps, shame’; Hester attributes the ‘fear’ to the ‘elegies’ when the syntax seems to suggest that this fear belongs only to the ‘satyrs’.²⁶⁹ Hester also accidentally misquotes *Pseudo-Martyr*, stating that Donne

²⁶⁹ Simpson (letter no. II), p. 316.

‘admitted that he himself “had ever been kept awake in a *fear* of Martyrdom”’.²⁷⁰ The passage to which Hester refers appears in the ‘Advertisement’ of *Pseudo-Martyr* thus:

I have beene ever kept awake in a meditation of Martyrdome, by being derived from such a stocke and race, as, I beleeeve, no family, (which is not of farre larger extent, and greater branches,) hath endured and suffered more in their persons and fortunes, for obeying the Teachers of the Romane Doctrine, then it hath done.

(sig. ¶2r)

Similar arguments to that of Hester’s are put forward by John Carey and Olga Valbuena, who use poems such as ‘The Bracelet’ to advance an argument for Donne’s ‘guilt over [his] spiritual infidelity’.²⁷¹ I refer to these studies in particular since they are the only interpretations, to my knowledge, that consider ‘The Bracelet’ in the light of *Pseudo-Martyr*—a consideration that is surely relevant to the contextualising of the poem and of Donne’s views on martyrdom, as is indicated by Robin Robbins’s general footnote to l. 21: ‘For D.’s opinion of the inefficiency of most martyrdoms see *Pseudo-Martyr*’.²⁷² Also, like Hester, Valbuena states that in the poem Donne’s ‘betrayal of the Catholic familial legacy looms large’, and Carey argues similarly that the subjects that occur in ‘The Bracelet’, such as ‘the betrayal of martyrs, and the “great burden” of the poet’s sin’, have ‘an almost confessional relevance’ with Donne expressing his feeling that he is ‘the cause of innocent suffering’.²⁷³ Also like Hester, both critics associate the poem in one way or another with Donne’s ‘meditation of Martyrdome’ from the ‘Advertisement’ of *Pseudo-Martyr*. In his chapter on Donne’s supposed apostasy, Carey refers to both the poem and the ‘meditation of Martyrdome’ to argue that Donne ‘could not help comparing the agonies of the English Catholics with his own relative ease’ and that his ‘lingering guilt’ in relation to the topic of martyrdom continued throughout his lifetime.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ p. 127 (my emphasis).

²⁷¹ Valbuena, *Subjects to the King’s Divorce*, p. 51.

²⁷² John Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Robin Robbins (London; New York: Longman, 2010), p. 291.

²⁷³ Valbuena, *Subject to the King’s Divorce*, p. 51; Carey, p. 39.

²⁷⁴ pp. 48-49.

Donne's 'meditation of Martyrdome', however, is in danger of being misrepresented if not considered within the context of the 'Advertisement'. In this section, Donne reveals that, having circulated *Pseudo-Martyr*'s chapter titles prior to the printing process, he 'received some light, that some of the Romane profession, having onely seene the Heads and Grounds handled in the Booke, ha[d] traduced [him], as an impious and profane under-valuer of Martyrdome'. Donne assures such readers that, due to his family history, he has not written *Pseudo-Martyr* as a 'carnall or ouer-indulgent fauourer of this life' but with 'a iust and Christianly estimation, and reuerence, of that deuout and acceptable Sacrifice of our lifes, for the glory of our blessed Sauour' (sig. ¶12r). This is neither a confession of guilt or betrayal, nor does it reveal much about Donne's feelings towards his family other than affirming that their 'suffer[ing]' has caused him to spend a great deal of time thinking about martyrdom. But thinking what, exactly? That they suffered as martyrs? As pseudo-martyrs? They suffered, he writes, 'for obeying the Teachers of the Romane Doctrine', and then swiftly moves on to emphasise that his thoughts on martyrdom will only be clear to those 'who shall be pleased to read the whole worke' (sig. ¶12r). This statement is interesting because, throughout *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne criticises the concept of blind obedience to earthly authorities, as well as those doctrines that he considers to be manmade – in particular, though not exclusively, those pertaining to the Roman Church. Donne's view on his family's suffering, he thus indicates, is a part of a much broader network of complex thoughts and ideas that address martyrdom in general rather than the beliefs of his family in particular.

This said, however, it is ironic that Donne's 'meditation of Martyrdome' has been given so much weight in determining his personal views considering that the 'Advertisement', while it should not be discounted, was probably included simply as an after-thought. Donne states that he had originally 'purposed not to speake any thing to the Reader, otherwise then by way of Epilogue' but that he 'changed [his] purpose' lest both reader and writer 'suffer some disadvantage, if he should not be fore-possessed, and warned in some things' (sig. ¶1r).

Commenting on the missing chapters of *Pseudo-Martyr*, the titles of which are included in the Donne's table of contents, Jesse M. Lander, argues persuasively that 'the ghostly presence of chapters 13 and 14 is a consequence of the decision to omit the final two chapters once the book was in the press', and that Donne may have felt the need, at this late stage, to provide an explanation for why these chapters were omitted – particularly because he demonstrates an anxiety about errors in his work, which he invites his reader to 'amend with his pen', and because he 'complains in *Pseudo-Martyr* about Bellarmine's inaccurate indices and tables'.²⁷⁵ Upon viewing the 1610 edition of *Pseudo-Martyr*, Lander explains that the 'Table, appearing on A4 recto and verso [...] is part of the first signature, while the Advertisement that acknowledges the inaccuracy of the Table is part of a two-leaf signature that also contains a list of errata and was clearly printed after the rest of the book was complete'.²⁷⁶ It seems that arguments which consider 'The Bracelet' in the light of the autobiographical sections from *Pseudo-Martyr* have not necessarily located the most convincing point of comparison between the texts.

A more relevant comparison can be drawn from chapter IV of *Pseudo-Martyr*, when Donne states that in the pope's 'Indulgences he doth as familiarly command Angels, as the younger Prentizes, the *Exorcists*, do devils' (sig. V4v). Once again using the pun on 'angels', Donne here refers to the idea of the pope having precedence over all the dignitaries of the world as well as to the way in which indulgences are used to advance the treasury of the Roman Church.²⁷⁷ Donne appears to present the same criticism in 'The Bracelet' when the speaker comments that 'Gold is restorative' (l. 112) and that angels can be sacrificed in order to redeem oneself of sin. The references, throughout the poem, to the selling of Indulgences, together with the frequent references to fire and hellish pain, establish an extended metaphor and mockery of the doctrine of purgatory. Such a mockery also occurs in *Ignatius His Conclave*,

²⁷⁵ See Lander, pp. 152-55.

²⁷⁶ p. 153.

²⁷⁷ Raspa, p. 335, n. to ll. 9-15.

in which purgatory and limbo are described as imitations of the ‘prophecies of *Homer, Virgil*, and the other *Patriarkes* of the *Papists*’ (p. 9), as well as in *Pseudo-Martyr* when Donne cites the fourth-century Roman poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens who used classical images in his poetry to describe, what has since become known as, purgatory. Clemens’s description was rejected by Robert Bellarmine, who claimed that Prudentius ‘*did but play More poetico*’ (sig. S3r).²⁷⁸ Donne compares Bellarmine’s rejection of Prudentius’s purgatory to his own rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, stating that ‘all discourse of Purgatorie seemes to me to bee but the *Mythologie* of the Romane Church, and a morall application of pious and useful fables’ (sig. S3r);²⁷⁹ the implication being that such doctrines are based on a false foundation, having been derived from the works of classical, pagan authors.

Donne contends that religious assurance, which leads men to blindly obey such manmade doctrines, has the potential to persuade others to believe possibly mistaken, and therefore possibly heretical, interpretations of Christianity. As Jesse M. Lander rightly observes, ‘Donne’s attack on the doctrine of purgatory is not the standard Protestant case against clerical greed and the selling of salvation’; rather it is concerned with ‘the way in which the terrors of purgatory are exploited to promote false martyrdom: the promise of an escape from purgatorial torments is, according to Donne, a strong but erroneous inducement to martyrdom’.²⁸⁰ The Roman Church, according to Donne’s example, is particularly at fault for ‘mis-incit[ing] men to an imagined Martyrdome’ by presenting false doctrines as religious truth (sig. R3r). Hester, Carey and Valbuena’s interpretations of ‘The Bracelet’, being predisposed to the assumption that the poem is written from Donne’s perspective, and that it is therefore autobiographical, disregard the idea that Donne’s ‘Ovidian and Petrarchan

²⁷⁸ See Raspa, p. 324, n. to ll. 18-26.

²⁷⁹ This was a fairly common accusation at the time, advanced by Reformers who believed that there was no scriptural authority for the doctrines of the Roman Church (see Healey, p. 105).

²⁸⁰ pp. 151-52.

poems are dramatic monologues spoken by lovers who are in a sense meant to be seen as negative morale *exempla* [models for what is to be avoided]'.²⁸¹ Read in the light of *Pseudo-Martyr*, it becomes apparent that the speaker of the poem, who betrays his martyrs unto the fire, has less in common with Donne the poet than he does with the Roman Church, as represented by Donne, which 'misinflames the minde to false Martyrdome' (sig. V1v).

To base true faith on the teachings of earthly authorities is, for Donne, to risk committing idolatry. Addressing individuals who proclaim a knowledge of religious truth, even though their beliefs may be founded upon a false foundation, Donne warns that 'God often punisheth a sinner much more severely because others have taken occasion of sinning by his fact' (*Biath.*, 'Preface'). He would later write in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* that man must remain humble and accept his limitation of knowledge: though he be '*a little World*' which is '*diminutive* to nothing' except God, the body can be destroyed by an unpreventable sickness 'in an instant' (Meditation I; Meditation V). The 'masters of that art' (the physician), he writes, 'can scarce number, not name all sicknesses' (Meditation IX), which leaves little hope for the patient who does not know his own remedy. As the patient observing 'the *Physician*, with the same diligence, as hee the *disease*' (Meditation VI), Donne clarifies 'that all the *Greatnes* of this world, is built upon *opinion* of others, and hath in it self no *reall being*' (Meditation XI). Thus, although man may be able to 'cure the *sharpe accidents* of *diseases*', or even, with great exertion, 'the *disease it selfe*', it is only 'the great *Physitian*' Christ who can 'cure the *body*, the *root*, the *occasion of diseases*'. The motif of the physician, on one level representing the medical practitioner, and on another level symbolising Christ, embodies the contrast between the limitations of human knowledge and the infinite wisdom of God. The lack of human knowledge, which renders the body vulnerable to nature, undermines 'man's great extent' and 'soaring thoughts', as a reminder that mankind is fallen as well as mortal – the

²⁸¹ N. J. C. Andreasen, *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary* (Princeton; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 19.

latter by result of the former. This theme is echoed throughout the *Devotions*, and particularly in the formidable tolling bells of Meditations XVI, XVII and XVIII. Indeed, the care that Donne takes throughout his works to reinforce the limitations of human knowledge, particularly in relation to sin, can be seen as countering texts like martyrologies which serve the purpose of persuading others to their cause.

Thus Donne attacks with particular force the Jesuits' supposed tendency to what he terms 'blinde and stupid obedience' (*PM*, sig. Dd11v). He includes, for instance, some farcical tales about such obedience, one being about two youths who 'sterued in the Desart, rather then they would eate the Figges, which they were commanded to deliuer' (sig. Dd1v), and another about the Jesuit Gonzaga, who, 'when desirous to be instructed in that point of *Predestination*, and his *Superiour* turning to a place in *S. Augustine*, and bidding him *read there*, being come to the end of the page, but not of the sentence, he durst not turne ouer the leafe, because he was bid to *read there*' (sig. Dd2r). The main danger of this blind obedience, Donne argues, is that it is driven by an 'intemperate hunger' for 'vaine-glory' and martyrdom (sig. li3v). Criticising the Jesuits as greedy and gluttonous, as individuals who '*swallow, and neuer chaw the cudde*' (sig. Dd1r), Donne employs the common medieval and early modern trope of associating knowledge and food as an allusion to Original Sin.²⁸² Due to their blind obedience and hunger for (a sinful) martyrdom, the Jesuits are condemned in *Pseudo-Martyr* for 'hunting and pursuing' their own deaths, 'First, over the tops of mountains' which is 'the Popes *Spiritnall power*' and then 'through thicke and entangling woods, without ways in or out, that is his *Temporall power*', not to mention the 'darke caves and dens of his Chamber Epistles, his *Breues*' (sig. li3v). With the '*Breues*' here referring to the pope's banning of the oath in 1606 and 1607, this image portrays the dangerously deliberate (or deliberately dangerous) 'pretences to Martyrdome' involved in refusing the oath of allegiance.

²⁸² Emily E. Speller, "'For Knowledge Is As Food'": Digesting Gluttony and Temperance in *Paradise Lost*, *Early English Studies*, 2 (2009), 1-28, notes that writers such as Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton (and, we might add, Donne) were 'aware of the long tradition depicting the first sin as gluttonous' (p. 7).

In order to counter this type of ‘*ambition and greediness of vaine glorie*’, Donne reinforces the idea that the protection of one’s life is of prime importance due to the law of self-preservation (sigs. li4r, Dd1v, li2v).²⁸³ Jesuits who antagonise the state would deliberately ‘vrge and importune, and force men to kill them’ (sig. Y1v), in which case Donne cannot see ‘how they could escape being *selfe-murderers*, but that their other reasons, and condemnations for them, make their executions iust’ (sig. li1v) because such self-murderers would be exposing themselves to ‘*certaine ruine, vpon vncertaine foundations*’ (sig. Hh4r). This argument follows Augustine’s line of reasoning in *City of God* that ‘it is plainly unlawful for any one’ to put themselves forward to die based on the belief that they have been ‘promised a mansion of eternity at their deaths’.²⁸⁴ Should a person be executed as a result of provoking his or her persecutor, therefore, that person would not be considered a martyr but rather a ‘selfe-murderer’, and therefore a pseudo-martyr. Thus, instead of pursuing martyrdom, the reader is reminded in *Pseudo-Martyr* to imitate ‘*Justinians great Officer Tiberius*’ who, ‘out of reverence to the signe of the Crosse [...] removed a Marble stone from the Pavement’ and then another and another until he found ‘a great plenty of treasure’ without having had this treasure ‘in his hope, nor purpose, nor desire before hand’.²⁸⁵ This story indicates that the ‘treasure and crowne of Martyrdome’ cannot be sought, but only discovered incidentally by those who ‘take vp deuoutly the crosses of this life, whether of pouerty, or anguish’d consciences, or obedience of lawes which seeme burdenous’ (sigs. F1v-F2r). In denying laws such as the Jacobean oath, which have been put in place for the safety and protection of the country,

²⁸³ Some objections have been raised regarding Donne’s use of self-preservation in *Pseudo-Martyr* to convince Catholic subjects that taking the oath of allegiance is a plausible form of protecting one’s life, considering that the overarching argument in *Biathanatos* that suicide is not always contrary to the law of self-preservation. For critics who find *Pseudo-Martyr* to be ironic or insincere on this basis, see Carey, pp. 18-19; and Flynn, *Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, p. 55. Sommerville argues, however, that in ‘*Biathanatos*, Donne argued that suicide can sometimes be liot if it is in a good cause. In *Pseudo-Martyr*, he daimed that opposing the oath of allegiance was a bad cause, and that those who died after doing so were not true martyrs’ (‘John Donne the Controversialist’, in *Professional Lives*, ed. by Coldough, p. 85).

²⁸⁴ 1610, I. 22. For Donne’s reading of Augustine, see Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne’s Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 23-64.

²⁸⁵ The source of this story is Paul the Deacon’s eighth-century continuation of Eutropius’s *Breviarium Historiae Romanae*, printed at Lyons in 1594 (Raspa, p. 283). The sixth-century Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (520-582) was often praised for his benevolence and charity.

and doing this with a dormant conscience, Donne contends that the Jesuits have no legitimate grounds for claiming martyrdom:

Nor is it so harsh and strange, as you vse to make it, that Princes should make it *Treason*, to aduance some Doctrines, though they be obtruded as points of Religion, if they inuolue *Sedition*, and ruine or danger to the State; for the Law sayes, *That is Maiestatis crimen, which is committed against the securitie of the State*; and in that place, it cals *Securitie, Tranquilitie*.

(sig. Bb3r)

In order to buttress his case, Donne refers to an important event that took place in Italy in 1606. During this year, Pope Paul V placed Venice under an ecclesiastical interdict. The Doge of Venice Leonardo Dona and his Senate were excommunicated for refusing to recognise the immunity of clerics from secular courts.²⁸⁶ Paolo Sarpi, a Venetian theologian and legal advisor, led a successful attack against the interdict, opposing those such as Robert Bellarmine and Cesare Baronio who were writing in defence of the papacy. Sarpi accused the Pope of looking ‘not for answers or allegation of reasons, but for a speedy and ready obedience’ in matters of the state: since ‘there is no derogation heerein from Ecclesiasticall libertie’, he argued, ‘the Prince hath a greater power over all the ground and free-holds of his dominion’.²⁸⁷ The people of Venice were instructed to disregard the papal bull and take an oath of allegiance, and their general adherence to the law established a separation of state and church. In 1607, the Pope, who had been publicly humiliated, had no choice but to lift the interdict. Venice became autonomous from the Holy See, and those who had remained loyal to Rome during the conflict, namely the Jesuits, were expelled for the alleged threat that they posed to the state. This conflict between Venice and Rome initiated a reassessment of the relationship between the state and the church in Western Europe, and reinforced the perception of the seditious Jesuit. Donne supported Venice’s rejection of the interdict, as did

²⁸⁶ Raspa, p. xxvii.

²⁸⁷ *A full and satisfactorie answer to the late maduised bull, thundred by Pope Paul the Fift, against the renommed state of Venice being modestly entitiled by the learned author, Considerations vpon the censure of Pope Paul the Fift, against the common-wealth of Venice*, trans. Father Paul of Venice (London, 1606), pp. 7, 13, respectively.

many Protestants who wished to challenge the extent of the pope's authority in temporal matters.

In *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne draws on the dispute to demonstrate that English Catholics would not be the first of that order to reject a papal brief for the protection and liberty of the state. He warns Catholics that the pope is thrusting them upon the civil sword by using them as 'instruments, to build vp his spirituall Monarchy to the ruine of all others': 'your selues must ciment and mortar the wals with your blood' (sig. C3r), he claims, since the pope's 'purposes must be executed vpon vs by you, or our iust Lawes for preuention thereof be Executed vpon you' (sig. C2r). Punning on the word 'brief', Donne asserts that:

It seemes that the Pope when hee would restraine the subiects of Princes, and keepe them short, when he would cut off there naturall and profitable libertie of obeying *Ciuill* Lawes, when he would fetter and manacle them in perplexities, and make them doe lesse then they should, to the losse of life, and liberties, he is content to send his *Breues* [...].

(sigs. Yy3v-Yy4r)

Donne here presents the pope as using his authority to manipulate Catholic subjects: when he is not issuing *Breues* to restrict their political obedience, he is issuing forth *Bulls*²⁸⁸ to 'blow vp Subiects with Rebellion'. These '*Bulls*', Donne writes, are 'called out of the tumor, and swelling of the *Seale*' (sig. Yy4r) in a manner conversant with the blood sport of bull-baiting. The Society of Jesus, which had endorsed the Venetian interdict, encouraged full obedience to the papal breues that had been issued in England in 1606 and 1607 relating to the Jacobean oath. Donne makes a point of differentiating between English Catholics, who have the potential to follow the example of the Venetian Catholics in disregarding the brief, and the Jesuits who, being 'disposed at the Popes absolute will' (sig. A4r), are the unfortunate animals of Donne's analogy bred to bait the bull. Donne uses further animal imagery to reinforce this point, comparing the Jesuits to a hyena, because it '*hath but one backe bone, and cannot turne except it turne all at once*'; the 'one back bone', the Church, 'is the Pope; And they

²⁸⁸ The leaden seals attached to papal edicts.

cannot turne, but all at once, when he turnes' (sig. Hh1r). In short, Jesuits are said to 'thinke the Pope so much God, (for Iesuites must exceede in euerything)' that they 'resolue to execute whatsoeuer he shall commaund' (sigs. Ff2r-Ff2v).

Similar to *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne's *Ignatius His Conclave* is a warning of the danger and corruption inherent in the Jesuits' tendency to, first, disobey and resist the king, and second, attribute too much power to the pope. As such, the Jesuits are described in the text as 'King-Killers' and 'Innovators' who threaten to shake the foundation of Christianity in their quest for pseudo-martyrdom. Upon arriving in hell, the narrator is confronted with a scene of Pope Boniface III and Mahomet arguing about who is more evil and therefore more deserving of access to the 'highest roome' in the underworld. Boniface is favoured by Lucifer because he 'destroyed the policy of the State of *Israel*', unlike Mahomet who 'attributed something to the old *Testament*' (p. 9). Boniface's disregard for the Hebrew Bible indicates a disregard for James's claim to divine right. By presenting Boniface as having the edge over Mahomet in evil, Donne refers to the idea that Boniface was the first pope to claim Roman primacy – a concept which formed the belief that a pope could quite plausibly sanction the killing of an excommunicated king.²⁸⁹ The degree of wickedness that Donne ascribes to his characters in hell is, therefore, directly associated with the extent to which they present a danger to the king.

With Mahomet having to 'be content to sit at the Popes feet', the narrator then provides an account of the cases made by several 'pretenders' who also wish to enter 'this more honourable roome, reserved for especiall Innovators' (pp. 12-13). The first of these pretenders is Copernicus, who makes a bold entrance by claiming to have given the earth motion. The narrator is surprised to find Copernicus in hell until he remembers that 'the *Papists* have extended the name, & the punishment of Heresie, almost to every thing'. Lucifer feels that it would be 'unjust to deny entry' to one who has made a case for himself as 'almost

²⁸⁹ p. 106.

a new Creator', but is also tentative to 'graunt it, to one of so great ambitions' (p. 15). Ignatius Loyola rushes to Lucifer's assistance, and declares that not only has Copernicus done nothing to benefit the hellish overlord but that he has also expressed scientific opinions that 'may very well be true' (p. 17). For Ignatius, who believes that dishonesty is the primary requirement for all those claiming to be evil, 'Innovation is a denial of truth, not simply [of] established and accepted opinion'.²⁹⁰

The next pretender is Machiavel who, having initially determined to challenge Ignatius, decides rather to flatter the Jesuit 'as well by this meanes to sweeten and mollifie him, as to make *Lucifer* suspect, that [...] his owne dignity might bee eclipsed, or clouded' (p. 25). After Machiavel constructs an infernal trinity with Lucifer as the father, Ignatius as the son, and the Bishop of Rome as the spirit, he then boasts of his own wicked deeds which include the invention of equivocation and the finding of 'meanes to open waies, even into Kings chambers' for the Jesuit 'executioners' (p. 29). Ignatius notices with contention that Lucifer is endeared towards Machiavel, and bursts into a desperate oration that occupies almost a third of the text. In this speech, which is often dubbed the 'dullest passage in the satire', Ignatius attempts to counter Machiavel's wickedness by running off an extensive list of sins committed by Jesuits.²⁹¹ These include lying, the invention of gunpowder, and king-killing. When this oration finally comes to an end, Donne's persona worries that his body may have started to 'putrifie' in the time it took for Ignatius to speak (p. 63).

When Lucifer agrees with Ignatius, Copernicus is cast aside for the next pretender, Paracelsus, who claims to have 'brought all *Methodicall Phisitions*, and the art it selfe into so much contempt, that that kind of phisick is almost lost' (p. 21). Ignatius observes 'a tempest risen in *Lucifers* countenance' and again intervenes by telling Paracelsus that since he has not done anything that is new to the Jesuits he does not 'deserve the name of an *Innovator*'. The

²⁹⁰ Coffin, p. 207.

²⁹¹ The quotation is taken from Coffin, p. 208.

main criticism raised by the bloody-minded Ignatius is that '*Physick* is a soft, & womanish thing' that does not '*naturally draw bloud*' but rather prevents diseases (p. 23). By continuously associating Jesuits with disease throughout *Ignatius His Conclave* and *Pseudo-Martyr*, reflecting a common trope of the period, Donne here jokingly suggests that in attempting to eradicate disease Paracelsus has put the Jesuit community in jeopardy. Paracelsus is thus denied entry into the highest room in hell, and is instead sentenced to 'governe in chiefe that Legion of homicide-Phisitians, and of Princes which shall be made away by poyson' (p. 25), where he will be able to use his medical knowledge for evil purposes.

After a failed attempt to admit Philip Neri in Ignatius's place, Lucifer devises a plan to send Ignatius to the moon so that he, and all the Jesuits, may 'reconcile the *Lunatique Church* to the *Romane Church*'. Lucifer reassures Ignatius that 'after the Jesuites have been there a little while, there will soone grow naturally a *Hell*' over which Ignatius 'shall have dominion' (p. 81), a gibe at the Society's missionary work, suggesting that its aim was not to proselytise but to gain power. Ignatius initially agrees to this plan until a loud noise erupts in hell; a new soul has arrived with the news that the Pope has 'at last entreated to make *Ignatius a Saint*' (p. 89). With a renewed sense of entitlement to remain in hell, Ignatius spots Boniface sitting in 'the principall place, next to *Lucifers owne Throne*' and, in a fit of rage, throws the Pope from the seat. Just as the narrator's soul begins its ascent back to earth, he notices Lucifer helping Ignatius, 'least, if hee should forsake him, his owne seate might bee endangered' (p. 97). Much of the humour of *Ignatius His Conclave* arises from the farcical characterisation of Lucifer who constantly fears that he will be overthrown by other, more evil characters. The naïve and gullible devil acts as a foil to the greedy antagonist Ignatius, who is described as being 'so indued with the Divell, that he was able to tempt, and not onely that, but (as they say) even to possesse the Divell' (p. 15). In this final scene, the power struggle between the two characters is won by Ignatius who is earlier described as 'the verier *Lucifer* of the two' (p. 31). Reunited with his body, the narrator concludes that having witnessed 'a Jesuit turne

the *Pope* out of his *Chaire* in *Hell* he suspects that ‘that *Order* would attempt as much at *Rome*’ (p. 97). A similar caveat appears in chapter IV of *Pseudo-Martyr* when Donne comments that ‘if euer a Iesuite come to be the Church, that is, the Pope, we shall soone be precluded by the Churches Definitions’ (sig. V2v).

Donne’s condemnation of the Jesuits’ religious assurance as treasonous and heretical provides a model for criticising all modes of religious extremity. In adopting the conventions associated with anti-Jesuitism, Donne also adapts them to put forward an argument for uncompromising conformity. By placing the martyr and pseudo-martyr within the secular conformist/recusant binary, as opposed to within the religious Catholic/Protestant dichotomy, Donne constructs an argument that could withstand the regime changes and religious fluctuations of the time.

CHAPTER 3

Disassociating Death and Martyrdom:
Donne's Unnoble Death

In the third century, Tertullian (c. 155-c. 250) famously wrote that 'the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians'.²⁹² This view, which advanced the common notion that martyrdom can only be achieved through death, could be found in the accounts of some of the church's earliest martyrs. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-c. 108), as a prominent example, was renowned for his enthusiasm to die for Christ. Having been condemned to a death of being eaten by animals in the Flavian Amphitheatre, Ignatius wrote a letter to the Roman Christians asking them not to intercede in his death: 'I am wheat of Jesu[s] Christ, which ought to be grounden between the teeth of these beasts, by which I may be pure bread for to be presented to my Lord'.²⁹³ Following his death, Ignatius was venerated as a martyr and was later described in the popular medieval hagiography, *The Golden Legend*, as a man of 'great merit'.²⁹⁴ Such figures as Ignatius, Judith Perkins states, 'explicitly linked conformity with the Christian community to Christ's Passion' and projected the 'message that to be a Christian was to suffer and die'.²⁹⁵

Perkins's valuable study explores the role played by second-century texts in the cultural representation of 'the human self as a body in pain, a sufferer', and contends that there was a discursive struggle between Christian texts and the 'prevailing, more traditional Greco-Roman image of the self as a soul/mind controlling the body'.²⁹⁶ At the centre of this discursive struggle was the idea of the noble death. In classical literature, such as Plutarch's *Lives of Noble Grecians and Romans*, the noble death is an act of self-sacrifice undertaken by honourable characters, whose inclination towards self-homicide exemplifies a greatness of

²⁹² Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. Sydney Thelwall, vol. 3, in *ANF*, chap. 50.

²⁹³ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 12.

²⁹⁴ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, p. 12.

²⁹⁵ *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 192, 24 respectively.

²⁹⁶ p. 3.

mind. Of particular note in Plutarch's work is the figure of Cato, who, in refusing to eschew his republican values, becomes his 'own master' when he decides to take his own life.²⁹⁷ As Eric v.d. Luft explains, 'Stoics would commit suicide to atone for their own sins, to prevent their own sinning, [and] to avoid their own disgrace'.²⁹⁸ A similar noble death can be identified in Christian hagiographies, such as *The Golden Legend*, which venerates as martyrs those who make public witness to their faith on the scaffold. It was through the representation of the suffering self, Perkins finds, that Christianity both 'triumphed' over Greco-Roman thought with the new concept of martyrdom and formed its 'institutional power' as a social and political unity.²⁹⁹

Whether or not a person was entitled to volunteer for martyrdom was, however, a complicated matter, and one that resulted in a conflict between the official attitude of the early church and the practice of its Christian adherents.³⁰⁰ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix notes that despite the deeds of many voluntary martyrs being remembered with enthusiasm by the faithful and recorded without disapproval, there was no 'open advocacy or approval of voluntary martyrdom in principle by any surviving Christian writer of the first few centuries' (with the exception of Tertullian in his later Montanist phase).³⁰¹ On the contrary, many outwardly condemned the practice.³⁰² One of the first to tackle the issue was Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215), who drew a distinction between two ideas that can now be termed 'normative' martyrdom and 'voluntary' martyrdom; the latter being broadly defined by Candida R. Moss as 'the bringing about of martyrdom either by presenting oneself to

²⁹⁷ For an account of Cato's death, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Dogmatic Treatises*, chap. 5.

²⁹⁸ *The Value of Suicide* (NY: Gegensatz Press, 2013), chap. 1. Google ebook.

²⁹⁹ p. 3.

³⁰⁰ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 155.

³⁰¹ pp. 155-56. Ste. Croix notes a couple of exceptions relating to incidents when a lapsed Christian wished to repent, or when a faithful Christian sees other believers on the point of lapsing and wishes to 'prevent this by making a voluntary confession at the decisive moment' (p. 155). Ste. Croix's estimated number of existing accounts of voluntary martyrdoms during the period is disputed in Candida R. Moss, 'The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern', *Church History*, 81, iss. 3 (September 2012), 531-51 (pp. 536-37).

³⁰² For a range of such sources see Ste. Croix, pp. 157-85.

authorities or by the unsolicited disclosure of one's Christian identity'.³⁰³ Finding that voluntary martyrdom was bound to result in a vain death, and that it should therefore be distinguished from true martyrdom, Clement diminished the role that bodily sacrifice could play in the defence of religious truth.³⁰⁴ For him, the term 'martyrdom' needed to be understood in its etymological sense of bearing witness and making a confession of faith. This view anticipated the views of later Christian theologians who came to recognise in voluntary martyrdom the noble death from Greco-Roman thought, and who sought to disentangle Christianity from what they considered to be heretical pagan traditions:³⁰⁵ Tertullian had, after all, used the examples of Lucretia, Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Cleopatra as models for his martyr-figure.³⁰⁶ Thus, arguing two centuries later that it is unlawful for anyone to put themselves forward for death in the belief that they will be

³⁰³ Moss, p. 532. Moss explains that 'the easy way in which the term "voluntary martyr" is used obscures the fact that it has no ancient philological counterpart. In the English language the notion and terminology of voluntary martyrdom pre-dates scholarly investigation of the early church. It emerges out of the religious reforms and conflicts in seventeenth-century England, a period in which both Catholics and non-conforming Protestants utilized the discourse of voluntary martyrdom both in their self-presentation and in their narration of the history of martyrdom' (p. 533). For further discussions on voluntary martyrdom see Paul Middleton, 'Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: a Statement for the Defence', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 64, pt. 2 (October 2013), 556-73; and Ste. Croix, pp. 153-200. Ste. Croix defines the voluntary martyr as 'a Christian who deliberately and unnecessarily provoked persecution'. I prefer Moss's definition to that of Ste. Croix on the basis that one cannot use the term 'unnecessarily' here in an objective manner. Interestingly, however, Ste. Croix argues that while voluntary martyrdom was ostensibly induced by persecution, it 'is impossible to doubt that the prevalence of voluntary martyrdom was a factor which both contributed towards the outbreak of persecution and tended to intensify it when it was already in progress' (p. 153).

³⁰⁴ Moss, pp. 542-43.

³⁰⁵ For the similarities between Greco-Roman thought and Christian martyrdom, see David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation*, in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, supplement series 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 113-41; and G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), at length. It should be noted that the root of Christian martyrology has been disputed, with some arguing that its origin lies not in Greco-Roman thought and culture but in Judaism. See, for example, Frend, esp. chapters 2 and 7; Daniel Boyarin, 'Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 577-627; and Ste. Croix, pp. 193-200.

³⁰⁶ Paul Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), p. 11. In a later article, 'Noble Death or Death Cult?: Pagan Criticism of Early Christian Martyrdom', in *Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Power Empire*, ed. by Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu (Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 207-229, Middleton demonstrates how Tertullian draws similarities between early Christian martyrs and Greco-Roman figures who embraced death, and how he expressed his surprise that pagans did not praise Christian martyrs for their bravery (p. 206). Middleton further shows that Tertullian employs athletic or military metaphors in his writing on martyrdom (pp. 207-214). In *Martyrdom and Rome*, Bowersock offers a slightly dearer argument, stating that Tertullian only draws such comparisons between Christian and pagan figures in order to contend that if a noble death could be suffered for a false cause, then surely it stands to reason that Christians should suffer the same for a true cause (p. 63).

rewarded thereafter, St Augustine redefined the theological nature of martyrdom with his argument that ‘it is not the punishment but the cause that makes the martyr’.³⁰⁷

This Scholastic view of martyrdom came to dominate Christian thought and influenced early modern martyrologies, such as John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church*. Yet, it should be noted that although Foxe ‘often repeats the mantra that the cause, not the death, makes the martyr, [he] also argues explicitly that the manner of one’s death reveals the rightness of one’s beliefs’.³⁰⁸ For the Foxean martyr, who is concerned only with religious truth, death is not requisite; yet, the illustrations of noble individuals being burned at the stake, which could provide a ready-made model of the martyr-figure, suggest that witnessing *through* death is an important part of martyrdom.³⁰⁹ These illustrations became iconic of Protestant heroism and could be considered as a guide on how to die a martyr’s death. Although Foxe had originally desired a scholarly readership, his work, as ‘one of the most ambitiously illustrated English works of its time’, soon amassed a more public appeal.³¹⁰ In 1571 the Privy Council ordered that *Acts and Monuments* be made available in every cathedral church; the text may have been too expensive for some to purchase, but it was therefore easy to get hold of.³¹¹ This meant that Foxe’s popular depictions of Protestant martyrs were accessible, at least in some degree, to readers of all ilks as well as to illiterate perusers.³¹² Due to the text’s rising popularity, subsequent editions, published in 1570, 1576, and 1583, respectively, were adapted to suit a lay readership, and it is relevant to note that

³⁰⁷ ‘Psalm XXXV’, *St. Augustine: Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, p. 184. For Augustine’s condemnation of putting oneself forward for death in the hope of receiving a reward thereafter, see *St. Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, I:22, p. 53.

³⁰⁸ Monta, p. 10.

³⁰⁹ Margaret Aston, ‘The Illustrations: Books 10-12’, in *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO* (Published online at <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> 2011) [Accessed: 12.02.16]. For further discussion on the relevance of the illustrations, see Susan Feldh, ‘Shaping the Reader in *Acts and Monuments*’, in *John Foxe*, ed. by Loades, pp. 52-65, who argues that Foxe had a large impact on promoting the reading tradition in early modern England, and, as such, played a vital role in making the invisible Church more prominent than the visible Church; and Margaret Aston and Elizabeth Ingram, ‘The Iconography of the *Acts and Monuments*’, in *John Foxe*, ed. by Loades, pp. 66-142.

³¹⁰ Aston, ‘The Illustrations: Books 10-12’.

³¹¹ Loades, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

³¹² Aston, ‘The Illustrations: Books 10-12’, notes that it was ‘not only simple souls who were *baited* by the power of the pictures’.

‘the pictorial element grew together with the text’.³¹³ These illustrations, which played a crucial role in the text’s account of the Marian persecutions by portraying martyrs who were prepared to seal their doctrine with blood,³¹⁴ became a powerful tool in exemplifying the extent to which church militants were expected to go in order to defend true religion from a heretical state. As John R. Knott argues, despite the ‘examinations in Foxe’s narrative, and their importance in defining the faith of prospective martyrs, it is the death scenes that stick in the mind’.³¹⁵

Counter-martyrologies not only employed the convention of the noble death, but also augmented it. The title of Richard Verstegan’s *Theatrum crudelitatum haereticorum nostri temporis* (‘Theatre of the Cruelties of the heretics of our time’) (1592), reflects, and probably fomented, the popular early modern attitude towards martyrdom as both a public spectacle and an act that involves torture and bodily suffering. If readers were stunned by Foxe’s illustrations of Protestants being burned at the stake, they would certainly have been shocked by Verstegan’s graphic images of Catholics being dismembered; crushed to death under seven-hundred pounds of rock; drowned; made to watch their own feet burning over a fire; and pulled, belly-down and naked, along a taut rope that chafed the genitalia.³¹⁶ Particularly important in *Theatrum crudelitatum* is the engraving that depicts the execution of Mary Stuart (1542-1587), the ‘gentle mother’ for whom ‘awaits a crown of blood, in compensation for the unspeakable axe’.³¹⁷ This image, as Anne Dillon states, ‘forms the finale of the English section, indeed, of the whole work’.³¹⁸ Verstegan further laments the execution of Mary in *A declaration of the true causes of the great troubles, presupposed to be intended against the realme of England,*

³¹³ Aston, ‘The Illustrations: Books 10-12’.

³¹⁴ Aston, ‘The Illustrations: Books 10-12’.

³¹⁵ *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature 1563-1694*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 78.

³¹⁶ *Theatrum Crudelitatum haereticorum nostri temporis* (Antwerp, 1592), pp. 25, 77, 41, 37, 35, respectively. For a discussion of Verstegan’s images of martyrdom, and the way in which these images were used to rally Catholics, both in England and on the Continent, to overthrow Elizabeth I and her government, see Dillon, chap. 5.

³¹⁷ *Theatrum*, p. 85. Translated by Dillon, p. 272.

³¹⁸ p. 273.

in which he states that blood will be spilled because, while ‘the force of truthe is great and dothe preuaile, the violence of the enemy is also mightely encreased’.³¹⁹ Although the popular martyrologies of Foxe and Verstegan did not explicitly state that bodily suffering and self-sacrifice was requisite in the making of a martyr, their representations of grisly but heroic deaths fuelled this assumption.

In redefining the significance and parameters of martyrdom, John Donne challenges the preconception that the martyr is required to seal his or her doctrine with blood. The great relevance of *Pseudo-Martyr*, as Anthony Raspa argues,

was that it addressed itself to minority English Catholics for whom lay waiting the uncivilized horror of execution by being hanged, drawn and quartered, and dissolved in boiling oil at the traitor’s gibbet at Tyburn outside London, with the possible inclusion in the Catholic calendar of martyrs as their reward.³²⁰

In terms of volunteering one’s life, Donne specifies that ‘we are commanded to do it so as Christ did it’ (*Biath.*, III.iv.5), and explains that Christ’s quick death on the cross, when ‘many martyrs [...] hanged upon crosses many days alive’ (III.iv.5), was due to Him willing His soul to leave the body. Quoting Christ’s famous words, ‘no man can take away my soul’ and ‘I have power to lay it down’ (John 10:18), Donne states that ‘without doubt, no man did take [Christ’s soul] away, nor was there any other than His own will the cause of His dying at that time’ (III.iv.5.4850-53). Having performed an ‘actual emission of His soul’, Christ’s martyrdom is presented in *Biathanatos* as a self-homicide (III.iv.5.4878).³²¹ This idea of Christ having had agency in His own death is, for many, central to the Christian faith.³²² In line with this view, it has been argued that under specific circumstances one has a moral obligation to imitate Christ and offer up his or her own life. With reference to St Paul’s soteriology, David

³¹⁹ (Antwerp, 1592; STC 10005), p. 8.

³²⁰ Raspa, p. xvii.

³²¹ For an intricate analysis of this section of *Biathanatos*, see Rudick and Battin, pp. lxxix-lxxxii. Also cf. *Deaths Duell*, p. 33: ‘There was nothing more free, more voluntary, more spontaneous than the death of Christ. It is true, *libere egit*, he died voluntarily’.

³²² See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a, q. 46; q. 47, pp. 5111-51; and Tertullian, bk. 2, appx. a, chap. x, pp. 345-50.

Seeley argues that Christ's death is 'vicarious' and 'mimetic', whereby metaphorical imitations of His death may substitute, or else prepare a person for, a literal imitation:

the beneficiaries of the vicarious effect of Jesus' death re-enact his death through a ritualized version of the story. In Romans 6, Paul asserts that believers die with Christ during baptism, i.e. they re-enact his death in their own lives. [...] By re-enacting Jesus' death in this way, they are transferred from the aeon of Sin to the aeon ruled by him. In putting things thus, Paul has coalesced the two categories of literal and imaginative re-enactment. The beneficiary of the vicarious effect of a martyr's death imaginatively re-enacts that death, being strengthened thereby in case a literal re-enactment becomes necessary.³²³

For Donne, a Christian may be expected to lay down his life for the glorification of God, but if he is to truly imitate Christ this act would need to be carried out in a state of purity and innocence. Although martyrdom can be achieved by means of a voluntary death, he argues, a voluntary death is not a martyrdom without the fundamental aspect of perfect charity – charity being the 'virtue by which martyrdom, which is not such of itself, becomes an act of highest perfection' and which ensures that all suffering is 'infallibly accompanied with the grace of God' (III.iv.1).³²⁴ Some have achieved this state of perfection, Donne claims, in giving the examples of Samson and St Paul (Donne refers to the latter in *Biathanatos* by his native name, Saul): like Paul, who died for God's glory, Samson is portrayed as 'a man so exemplar' because his voluntary death was carried out 'with the same zeal as Christ, unconstrained; for in this manner of dying, as much as in anything else, he was a type of Christ' (III.v.4). Although some have therefore managed to imitate Christ's death in its fundamental characteristic, Donne emphasises that the state of perfect charity is, in most cases, unattainable for Man who is fallen. As Michael Rudick and M. Pabst Battin note, for Donne 'the likelihood of imitating Christ's act in its central characteristic—that it is not self-

³²³Seeley, pp. 147-48.

³²⁴ Donne is here citing Aquinas 2a2ae, q. 124, a. 3; 2a2ae, q. 136, a. 3. For an excellent and cautious reading on the topic of charity in *Biathanatos*, see Ettenhuber, pp. 137-62.

interested, but wholly for the glory of God—is so small, that acts of this type must in general be forbidden’.³²⁵

Furthermore, Donne argues in *Pseudo-Martyr* that the circumstances under which one may imitate Christ in death apply *only* to situations when the foundation of Christianity, the ‘vnity of the God-head, or the Trinity of the persons’, is in danger of being shaken and destroyed. Although these ‘*Elements* of the Christian Religion’ would need to be defended in such circumstances, no person needs to volunteer their life in order to establish them as truth since this feat was already handled by the early martyrs (sig. F4v). It is superfluous, Donne writes, for a man to ‘expose his life for testimony of a matter, which were already beleaved, or to which he were not called by God’ (sig. F2v).³²⁶ To do so would be to die for the ‘*integrity* of the beliefe’ (sig. F4v, my emphasis) rather than for the belief itself, and a person’s religious integrity, which is considered by Donne to be a product of contradictory or subjective teachings and exegeses, should not be defended with the same zeal that was used by the early martyrs to defend the truth of the foundation.³²⁷ Thus, although the ‘blood of the Martyres was the milke which nourished the Primitiue Church, in her infancy’, the form taken by martyrdom has changed over time in accordance with the church’s needs:

in these times, when [Christ] is in possession of the world, [he] seale[s] his graces to vs by himselfe in his word and Sacraments, and doth not so frequently call witnesses and Martyrs, as he did in the Primitiue Church, when he induced a new Religion, and saw that, that maner of confirmation was expedient for the credite and conueiance thereof.

(sig. F2v)

The enduring characteristic of martyrdom is therefore not death but the glorification of God. Death, in this respect, is not required for martyrdom, but is a consequence suffered incidentally for God’s glory: the means are mutable but the end remains the same. As such, one cannot argue that a person should or should not die for the glory of God, only that a

³²⁵ Rudick and Battin, p. lxxxiii.

³²⁶ In summarising this argument I have borrowed some phrasing from Monta, p. 135.

³²⁷ See Dillon, p. 27.

person is bound to volunteer for death if, first, this act is necessary for defending the foundation of Christianity in a situation when it would otherwise be demolished; and, second, this act will be carried out in a state of perfect charity.

This point is made explicit in Donne's Holy Sonnet 7, 'Spit in my face, you Jews', which shows that simply attempting to imitate the manner of Christ's dying is, in itself, insufficient for attaining martyrdom. The poem begins with what appears to be the speaker's desire to re-enact the Passion and undergo a voluntary or provoked martyrdom: 'Spit in my face, you Jews, and pierce my side; | Buffet and scoff, scourge and crucify me' (ll. 1-2). But what appears to be an accusatory tone in these lines turns out to be one of pleading as the speaker becomes his own persecutor: 'For I have sinned and sinned, and only he | Who could do no iniquity hath died' (ll. 3-4). Far from attempting to emulate Christ, the speaker here accentuates the differences between the human and the divine, the sinful and the sinless; he is asking not to be martyred like Christ (who was capable of bearing the sins of others), but to take responsibility for his own sins by making reparations with his life. The antithesis between man and God throughout the poem serves to indicate the insufficiency of, in Monta's words, 'the conception of suffering as a *quid pro quo* repayment for Christ's sacrifice'.³²⁸ According to Donne's theory in the preordination prose, the speaker's proposed voluntary martyrdom, which would lack the basis of perfect charity having been founded upon a self-interested motive, would proceed from a 'corrupt prodigality' of his life; this being a sin shared by pseudo-martyrs for whom 'honour, ease, deuotion, shame, want, paine, any thing serued for a reason, not only to forsake themselues, or to expose themselues to vn-euitable dangers, but also to be their owne executioners' (*PM*, sig. E3v). Ste. Croix writes that the 'distinguishing characteristic of the voluntary martyrs is a positive craving for martyrdom for its own sake', and this is the very characteristic that Donne seeks to condemn.³²⁹ Coming

³²⁸ Monta, pp. 139-40.

³²⁹ p. 188.

to the realisation that death is insufficient as a means of sharing in Christ's atonement, the speaker of Holy Sonnet 7 interrupts himself thus:

But by my death cannot be satisfied
My sins, which pass the Jews' impiety:
They killed once an inglorious man, but I
Crucify him daily, being now glorified.
(ll. 5-8)

Employing a speaker who essentially talks himself out of committing pseudo-martyrdom, the poem dramatises the argument made in both *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr* 'that neither to avoid occasion of sin, nor for any other cause wherein myself am merely or principally interested, I may do this act [of self-homicide]' (*Biath*, II.iv.1.2877-78).³³⁰ This point answers to a view put forward in Catholic texts, such as Robert Bellarmine's *De Baptismo et Confirmatione*, that martyrdom abolishes sin;³³¹ texts which, Donne notes in an attack on the doctrine of Merits, 'preferre Christs passion before our merits' (*PM*, sig. S1v). For Donne, a person is not entitled to put him or herself forward for the 'high degree of a consummate Martyre,' this being a title that 'is not ordinarily attained to *per Saltum* [i.e. by reaching a position that has not been earned]'. Rather, he or she is expected to 'be content to serue God first in a lower ranke and Order' (sig. F2v). Indicating his inferiority to Christ, the speaker of 'Spit in my face' notes that he must first serve God by ensuring that His sacrifice was not made in vain: 'O let me, then,' he resolves, 'his strange love still admire' (l. 9). To forget the reasons as to why Christ's sacrifice was necessary in the first place is to go on crucifying Him daily. The speaker therefore recognises his duties to desist from sin and to repent. This idea resonates with the speaker's plea to God at the end of Divine Meditation 7, 'At the round Earth's imagined corners': 'here on this lowly ground | Teach me how to repent, for that's as good | As if thou'dst sealed my pardon with thy blood' (ll. 12-14). Thus the aim is not to imitate Christ through death: Man's blood cannot be shed as a *quid pro quo* repayment for

³³⁰ Donne is here agreeing with Augustine; see *City of God*, I:26. See also Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), sigs. S1v-S3r; Raspa, n. to ll. 8-14; 22-33, p. 323.

³³¹ For an explanation of how this idea figures in Paul's doctrine of salvation see Seeley, p. 148.

that of Christ's because only 'Christ's blood [...] hath this might: | That, being red, it dyes red souls to white' (Holy Sonnet 2, 'o my black soul!', ll. 13-14). This conviction that only Christ's blood could be powerful enough to abolish sin and pure enough to attain martyrdom is echoed in the preface to *Pseudo-Martyr* in which Donne notes that even those martyrs whose blood nourished the primitive church '*are such as haue washed their garments, not in their owne blood onely (for so they might still remaine redde and staine'd) but in the blood of the Lambe which changes them to white*' (sig. E1r-v). Donne's argument reaches its full force in the conclusion to his final sermon, *Death's Duel*, when the speaker calls on the congregation to climb up onto the crucifix and suck at Christ's wounds in order to initiate a physical and penetrative blending with God. In this instance, Christ is not to be replaced on the cross nor is His death to be imitated; rather, the 'incorruptible blood' of His body is to be availed by Christians to prepare them for an ascension into the heavenly kingdom.³³²

For Donne, voluntary death has thus become a poor substitute for consummate martyrdom, a corrupt means by which a person attains to the title *per Saltum*. The 'externall honours, by which the memories of the Orthodox Martyres in the Primitiue Church were celebrated and enobled', he writes, has

inflamed the Heretiques also to an ambition of getting the like glory. And thereupon they did not onely expose and precipitate themselues into all dangers, but also inuented new wayes of Martyredome; with hunger whereof they were so much enraged and transported, that some of them taught, That vpon conscience of sinne to kill ones selfe, was by this acte of Iustice, a Martyrdome [...].

(PM, sig. F3r)

Donne finds that this desire to achieve fame and glory as a martyr led to the corruption of many during the fourth and fifth centuries with the rise of the extremist Donatists and Circumcellions, who are said to have extorted this 'imagined Martyrdome' either by importuning others to kill them or by committing self-homicide (sig. F3r-F3v). This point is reinforced in *Biathanatos* when Donne describes the age as one that 'was grown so hungry

³³² Donne, *Death's Duell*, p. 43.

and ravenous' of martyrdom that babies were 'baptized only because they would be burnt' and 'children taught to vex and provoke executioners, that they might be thrown into the fire' (I.iii.2); 'even against the nature of the word "martyr,"' Donne protests, 'it became the common opinion that death was requisite and necessary to make one a martyr' (I.iii.2). He takes as one of his examples the story of the fourth-century woman of Edessa who dragged her son through the streets, after the Emperor Valens had forbidden the Christians a temple, and declared: 'I do it lest when you have slain all the other Christians, I and my son should come too late to partake that benefit' (I.iii.2).³³³

The preordination prose therefore seeks to distinguish true martyrdom, which is a glorification of God, from false martyrdom, which is a self-interested act leading to a superfluous and sinful self-destruction. Although Donne establishes this argument as a general rule that pertains to extremists of all Christian denominations who are led into nonconformity, he writes that the Roman Church is particularly guilty of encouraging false martyrdom. As Andrew Hadfield argues, there is an indication in *Biathanatos* that

The Catholic Church celebrates its martyrs without question even though the historical record does not support or justify what they believe. Accordingly, many may well be pseudo-martyrs held up as examples to encourage yet more pseudo-martyrs, very close to, if not actually, a case of mass suicide.³³⁴

Such a view is made explicit in chapter II of *Pseudo-Martyr*, which argues that whereas the primitive church defended the foundation of Christianity, which, if shaken, would 'ruine and demolish all', the Roman Church finds the '*integrity* of the belief' to be the 'onely forme of Martyrdome' (sig. F4v, my emphasis). In relation to the 1606 Jacobean oath of allegiance, which was heavily contested by the Roman Church and Catholic nonconformists, Donne therefore argues that

³³³ According to Rudick and Battin, p. 224, this story, which has Catholic sentiments, comes from Nicæphorus Callistus, *Ecclesiasticae Historiae libri XVIII* (p. 146).

³³⁴ 'Controversial Prose', in *John Donne in Context*, ed. by Michael Schoenfeldt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). See also Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature*, p.134.

it will not constitute a Martyrdome, to seale with your bloud any such point heere, as the affirming of the contrary, would not draw you into the fire at Rome. Except you should be burned for an Opinion there, you cannot be reputed Martyrs, for holding the contrarie here. As therefore it were no Heresie at Rome, to denie the Popes direct power, nor his indirect, (for if it were, Bellarmine and Baronius had made vp an Heresie betweene them, as Sergius and Mahomet did) so is the affirmation thereof no article of faith in England.

(sigs. Eee1v-2r)

In being executed as a result of refusing the oath of allegiance in defence of the pope's direct or indirect power, the nonconformist 'destroies himselfe' in the face of a perfectly legitimate temporal requirement: he has failed to 'defend his life by a lawfull acte, and entertaines not those ouertures of escape, which God presents him' (sig. Hh2r). Just like the false martyrs of the fourth century, early modern Jesuits are criticised by Donne for being too 'delighted with impious prouocations to the effusion of bloud' (sig. Hh1r): rather than wanting to honour Christ's sacrifice, Donne contends, they are driven by a desire for self-glorification and they view voluntary martyrdom as a convenient means of achieving this end. Should a person be executed as a result of provoking his or her persecutor, according to *Pseudo-Martyr*, that person would not be considered a martyr but rather a 'selfe-murderer', and therefore a pseudo-martyr. In accusing voluntary martyrs of 'selfe-murder', Donne was also accusing them of committing a heinous crime, for in early modern England self-killing was 'a species of murder, a felony in criminal law and a desperate sin in the eyes of the church'.³³⁵

By condemning the voluntary martyr as a self-murderer, Donne puts forward a case that both resembles the orthodox Christian argument against voluntary martyrdom and is distinct from it. Unlike the Stoics who advanced the views that a person could seek atonement in death, and that the act of self-homicide could be carried out in a state of nobility, Christian theologians perceived of death as a consequence of Original Sin (a punishment), and argued, with Augustine at the forefront, that any form of self-killing

³³⁵ Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 15.

violates the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’.³³⁶ This argument forms the basis of Augustine’s case against voluntary martyrdom, which sought to invert the noble death by making it ignoble and sinful. Augustine’s argument was expanded by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, who contends that killing ‘oneself is contrary to natural inclination, and contrary to the charity by which one ought to love oneself’.³³⁷ Aquinas largely aligned himself with Augustine’s position, but, as Rudick and Battin note, he contributed three new arguments: two are non-Scriptural, ‘that based on the presumed natural law of self-preservation, and that based on the individual’s obligation to the human community’, and a third ‘based on the notion of life as a gift from God’. These additions had by the early modern period become part of the orthodoxy.³³⁸ Furthermore, based on Matthew 4:1-5:6, in which Satan tries to tempt Christ to suicide, John Calvin stated that the act was driven by diabolical agency, and was therefore a product of temptation and sin. As the Christian doctrines of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin were embodied in the law during the early modern period, suicides were often tried posthumously for committing a heinous crime at the ‘instigation of the devil’.³³⁹ Indeed, the penalty for a suicide being convicted as a *felo de se* (felon of himself),³⁴⁰ which condemned the person as a self-murderer, was so severe that relatives of the deceased could find themselves reduced to penury.³⁴¹

Although Donne agrees with the theological argument that sought to separate death from martyrdom, he argues that Augustine’s case regarding the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ is insubstantial since self-killing is nowhere explicitly prohibited in Scripture (*Biath.*, III.ii.1). The idea of patristic exegesis that self-killing is sinful, Donne contends, is an idea

³³⁶ *City of God*, I:16-22.

³³⁷ 2a2ae, q. 64, a. 5.

³³⁸ See Jeffrey R. Watt, ‘Calvin on Suicide’, *Church History*, 66, no. 3 (September 1997), 463-76.

³³⁹ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 42. The authors demonstrate that the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw a heavy enforcement of the law of suicide, with over ‘95 per cent of the men and women who killed themselves between 1485 and 1660 [...] convicted as *felones de se*’ and ‘fewer than 2 per cent [...] excused as persons *non compos mentis* [not of sound mind]’ (p. 42).

³⁴⁰ One who ‘deliberately puts an end to his own existence, or commits any unlawful malicious act, the consequence of which is his own death’ (*OED*, 1a).

³⁴¹ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 15.

that has been blindly accepted and incorporated into the body of Christianity without anyone bringing 'the metal [established views] now to the test, nor touch, but only to balance'. In accepting such doctrines without question, 'everybody hath so sucked, and digested, and incorporated into the body of his faith and religion, that now they prescribe against any opposer'.³⁴² In order to remove the prejudice associated with suicide and re-evaluate the Scriptural evidence on the matter, Donne argues that it is essential that a person brings their judgement 'nearer to a straightness' because 'whatsoever is in our appetite good or bad was first in our understanding true or false' (I.i.1). He reasons in *Biathanatos* that the act of homicide (which was considered equivalent to the act of self-homicide) cannot be deemed sinful in and of itself since God, who can command, and has commanded, the killing of people, cannot command a sin: 'things which we call sin, and so evil, have been done by the commandment of God: by Abraham, and the Israelites in their departing from Egypt'.³⁴³ Since 'there is no external act naturally evil' but 'circumstances condition them, and give them their nature' (III.iii.3), Donne reasons that death 'is not evil, nor is it evil to wish it' (II.vi.4). The only sin of which we can be certain, he states, is Original Sin, and thus 'All is obedience or disobedience' (I.i.7).

In presenting the striking argument that self-killing is not expressly forbidden by divine, natural or civil law, *Biathanatos* constitutes the first known Christian defence of suicide in the English language.³⁴⁴ Donne's argument not only renegotiates the factors that may or

³⁴² On the title page of *Biathanatos*, Donne reinforces this point with his disclaimer that '*Non omnia vera esse profiteer; sed legentium usibus inservire*' ('I do not insist on the truth of everything herein, but I wish to serve the readers' uses') (transl., Rudick and Battin, *Biathanatos*, p. 198), and in the 'Preface' he urges readers to take issue with his argument, comparing the multiplicity of opinions on the matter of self-homicide to 'disorderly long hair, which was pride and wantonness in Absolon and squalor and horridness in Nebuchadnezzar, was virtue and strength in Samson and sanctification in Samuel' (ll. 1239-42).

³⁴³ In his article 'The Definition of Sin in Donne's *Biathanatos*', in *Modern Language Notes*, 72, no. 5 (May 1957), 332-35, A. E. Malloch describes Augustine as 'Donne's chief antagonist' in *Biathanatos* (p. 332). See also, Michael MacDonald, 'The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Laymen, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500-1870', *The Milbank Quarterly*, 67, supplement 1. Framing Disease: The Creation and Negotiation of Explanatory Schemes (1989), 69-91, who agrees with Donne's argument in *Biathanatos* 'that theological prohibitions against suicide were weak' (p. 71).

³⁴⁴ Rudick and Battin, p. ix. Rudick and Battin further note that in making his case for suicide, 'Donne in fact uses no arguments favourable to suicide which come from classical sources' (p. xxiii).

may not be used in order to define martyrdom and pseudo-martyrdom, but is also used to make a case for absolutism. Unlike Augustine, who determines that voluntary martyrdom is sinful because the outward act of suicide is sinful, Donne considers that there are a number of factors that would need to be taken into account in order to define the nature of an outward action, and that, in some cases, the outward action may be misinterpretable (to use Donne's word to describe the subject of *Biathanatos*). The most important determining factor, however, is considering whether the act was undertaken in 'obedience or disobedience' to God and, by extension, to the monarch – and a sure sign of disobedience is a subject's 'Ambition of beeing Lord of [himself]' (*PM*, sig. E3v). Thus, suicide, while not sinful in itself, is only permissible when the intention that drives the act is devoid of a proclaimed political or religious content. Donne's argument against voluntary martyrdom is not an argument against suicide, but an attack on the corrupt desire accompanying that act, which is to attain to the title of martyrdom *per Saltum* (attempting to reach a position that has not been earned). Suicide, in this respect, has been at the centre of the political battle between the state and the subject throughout history: with subjects having killed themselves for 'honour, ease, deuotion, shame, want, paine' or even to 'auoid slavery', emperors have had to modify 'their lawes and ciuil Constitutions' (sigs. E3v-E4r) to exercise some measure of control for the sake of the spiritual welfare of those who must 'be content to serue God first in a lower ranke and Order', which may involve suffering under the burden of conformity (sig. F2v).

It should be noted that to use the term 'suicide' in relation to Donne and his contemporaries is to use the term anachronistically. As Rudick and Battin point out, this term 'did not make its appearance in the English language until about fifty years after Donne wrote *Biathanatos*'—1656 according to the *OED*—and that in contemporary English usage, it 'retains strong negative connotations'.³⁴⁵ Being reserved, according to Rudick and Battin, for situations such as a 'young man' leaping 'from a bridge in order to get even with his girl

³⁴⁵ Rudick and Battin, p. xlii.

friend', it is not typical in modern times to use the term 'suicide' in 'connection with morally praiseworthy self-killing'; in such instances terms such as 'heroism' or 'self-sacrifice' would substitute.³⁴⁶ Similarly, in both *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*, Donne sorts through the different categories of self-killing and, although they most often fall under the terms 'self-homicide' and 'self-murder', he is very careful to distinguish between them in order to establish the instances in which 'Self-Homicide is not so naturally Sin that it may never be otherwise'. This paradox, which comprises the subtitle of *Biathanatos*, highlights the text's casuistic style, or case-based reasoning, in evaluating different forms of self-killing, which are not only distinct from each other but which are also distinct from voluntary martyrdom.³⁴⁷

In order to fully distinguish Donne's argument against voluntary martyrdom from that of Augustine's, and to therefore understand how Donne renegotiates the parameters of martyrdom in the light of the established views, it is necessary to examine Donne's defence of a 'depoliticised' suicide: an 'un-noble' death that is neither heroic nor sinful. In judging suicide in terms of obedience and disobedience, Donne distinguishes the 'depoliticised' suicide, which does not constitute an act of defiance against the state, from the 'politicised' suicide, which does. In associating wrongful suicide with disobedience, rather than with sin, Donne addresses a potential weakness in Augustine's argument which is that a martyr, if perceived as such, cannot be said to have died in a sinful condition. S/he can, however, always be said to have died out of disobedience to the state. Having eliminated the inherent sinfulness from suicide, Donne reinscribes voluntary martyrdom with a sinful content by politicising it as an act of treason. Positing the state as the best defence of true religion, as I have argued in the previous chapters, Donne contends that a suicide undertaken in disobedience to the monarch threatens to shake the very foundation of Christianity.

³⁴⁶ Rudick and Battin, p. xlii.

³⁴⁷ Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), explains that the terms 'self-murder' and 'self-slaughter' have violent connotations (p. 203), while the early modern jurist Edmund Plowden (1518-1585) distinguished homicide, synonymous with "manslaughter," from murder, which entails premeditated malice (see Rudick and Battin, p. 232, n. to l. 2706).

II

In conceiving of Donne's reinterpretation of the noble death, it is beneficial to consider his argument not just in the light of the established Christian views, but also in relation to the works of such writers as Shakespeare who utilised the classical art of self-killing for dramatic purposes. Indeed, a possible explanation for the prominence of the death scenes in early modern martyrologies is that, although martyrologists were drawing on the Scholastic idea that the cause rather than the death makes a martyr, the period also saw a revival of the classical noble death with the reprinting of works by such authors as Ovid, Plutarch and Seneca. Foxe's illustrations, for example, may well be indebted to these classical sources and, equally, the iconic death scenes of early modern martyrologies may well have influenced or complemented Shakespeare's representation of his particularly heroic characters:³⁴⁸ Brutus, 'the noblest Roman of them all', impales himself on his sword with 'so good a will' that he will receive 'all respect and rites of burial' (5.5.52ff.); Cleopatra, dressed in her finest, applies asps to her breast and arm to avoid public shame (5.2.271ff.); and Antony, 'a Roman, by a Roman | Valiantly vanquish'd', stabs himself, though not quite with the desired dramatic effect (4.14.95ff.).³⁴⁹ Whether martyrologies were competing to replace the classical noble death with the Christian martyrdom, or whether the concepts were sometimes conflated (intentionally or incidentally) due to popular culture or else because they shared historical roots, is a matter that is still widely debated. The noble death, however, was evidently a common literary trope and dramatic device in early modern England, and the resurgence of classical fiction provided a rich source of materials for popular writers like Shakespeare.

³⁴⁸ See, for example, Patrick Collinson, "'A Magazine of Religious Patterns': An Erasmian Topic Transposed in English Protestantism", in *Godly People* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), pp. 499-525; Tom McAlindon, *English Renaissance Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 18-20. 'What is a Shakespearean Tragedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-22 (p. 15).

³⁴⁹ Lois Potter, 'Assisted Suicides: "Antony and Cleopatra" and "Coriolanus" in 2006-7', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 509-29, states that Antony's suicide invites comedic treatment, and discusses this in relation to the 2006-7 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Antony and Cleopatra* at Shakespeare's Globe, directed by Dominic Dromgoole (pp. 512-16).

In addition to this source material, the different variations of the noble death in early modern literature was also shaped by the ways that authors worked through the tensions that arose via their engagement both with dominant Christian forms of contemporary religious-political thought and those ideas which, while they could in certain ways be incorporated within these dominant systems of thought and practice, always had the potential to question their pre-existing limits. Thus, while the noble death was able to re-emerge in early modern England, in a changed context where it could be placed at the service of dominant Christian ideas of martyrdom, as seen in Foxe's work, it also resulted in Foxe's martyrology having a somewhat ambiguous position in relation to the era's dominant Scholastic mode of thought. In essence, the attempted incorporation of a set of classical, non-Christian ideas and representations within Christian notions of martyrdom—albeit ideas which were re-shaped and which many Christian authors sought to make more agreeable to dominant doctrine—provided an additional element to the contemporary conjuncture at which Christian martyrdom might be rethought. As Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy argue:

the tide of hostility toward suicide among the educated élite was also accompanied by an undertow of opposition. Even as administrative and religious reform intensified the conviction that suicide was a diabolical crime, the revival of classical philosophy and science fostered renewed awareness of more tolerant attitudes.³⁵⁰

The inclusion of the noble death within a Christian framework therefore raised the prospect that it could also have an influence on the dominant understanding of martyrdom, as much as simply being a passive appendage to it. It meant, as well, that when polemicists, playwrights and pamphleteers of the later sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries engaged in arguments over martyrdom and political authority, they were able to draw on a wider range of resources in making their arguments, potentially enabling a shifting of the boundaries of possible and acceptable arguments. Such literature, then, was dialogic in nature. Indeed, as Hadfield argues and clearly demonstrates in his studies on Shakespeare, 'English literature – especially drama

³⁵⁰ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 86.

– emerged as a discipline in the late sixteenth century within a culture of political argument’ and ‘was an especially important form for advancing political debate’.³⁵¹

Shakespeare’s representation of honourable, Stoic suicides in the construction of some of his tragic heroes, which emulates republican figures with anti-monarchist ideas, such as Cato, signals a difference between the republicanism of Shakespeare’s plays and the absolutism of Donne’s preordination prose: while the former imagine or replicate scenarios in which individuals holding supreme power may become masters of themselves by claiming their own lives, the latter condemns as a ‘corruption’ the ‘Ambition of beeing Lord of our selues’ (*PM*, sig. E3v).³⁵² Yet, Shakespeare’s engagement with sources that held values contrary to the established ideas of his time meant that, although he could quite easily stage noble suicides for classical characters such as Antony, Cleopatra, Eros, Brutus, and Cassius, and Portia (who commits self-homicide offstage, but whose death is described honourably), he would have difficulty justifying as noble a suicide committed within a Christian play. Indeed, the only Christian characters that commit suicide on stage are Romeo, Juliet, and Othello, and their deaths are framed by the classical conventions of courtly love and chivalry: while Romeo and Juliet commit a love-suicide, Othello falls upon his sword in a Roman-like fashion.³⁵³ The difficulty that Shakespeare faced in justifying Christian suicides is further reflected by the ambiguity of Ophelia and Lady Macbeth’s deaths; this ambiguity contrasts the explicit report of Goneril’s suicide, whose final actions within a Christian context are befitting of a wicked character. The representations of these problematic suicides exhibit a tension between pagan and Christian values, but they also move beyond such conventions into the realms of the psychological. In this respect, Shakespeare’s works presage a shift that was about to occur in the religio-political debates on suicide, whereby the demonic or noble

³⁵¹ *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 7.

³⁵² On Shakespeare’s republicanism, see Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, esp. chaps 4-6.

³⁵³ On the use of these classical convention in early modern representations of suicide, see MacDonald and Murphy, pp. 95-103, 290-98.

death could be newly ascribed to medicine. This is a shift that Donne would bring to full realisation in *Biathanatos*, ahead of the predominant thought of his time.³⁵⁴ Both of these authors, then, use suicide as a literary trope to adumbrate larger political and theological questions about self-governance, and, by contemporary standards, both of these authors hold extraordinary views on the matter. Although they adopt very different forms, styles, and stances, it is worth examining some of the complexities of Shakespeare's Christian suicides, before progressing to a discussion on Donne, in order to explicate the context against which Donne's reinterpretation of the noble death can be defined.

In reimagining classical self-homicides, Shakespeare was drawing on, sensationalising, and perpetuating the popular, albeit unorthodox, attitude towards honourable suicide in early modern England.³⁵⁵ Within a society of Christian values that deemed suicide as sinful, Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy note, many early modern texts establish 'links between apostasy, despair, and suicide' whereby the '[r]enunciation of religious truth in favour of false doctrine leads to diabolical temptations and to despair and self-murder'.³⁵⁶ An explicit example of this tradition can be found in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.³⁵⁷ In 2.3 of the play, instruments for suicide are laid before Faustus after he hears the fearful echo in his ears, 'Faustus, thou art damned!'. Stating that he 'cannot repent', Faustus acknowledges the power that the devils have over him psychologically.³⁵⁸ In 5.1, the notion of diabolical agency is literalised as Mephistophilis gives Faustus a dagger that he may 'Despair and die', which emphasises that both despair and

³⁵⁴ For a study of how European ideology brought about this shift in understanding, see Jeffrey R. Watt, ed., *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), at length.

³⁵⁵ David L. Kranz, 'Shakespeare's New Idea of Rome', in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 18), ed. by Paul A. Ramsay (Birmingham; New York Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1982), pp. 371-80, describes suicide as the quintessential Roman act in Shakespeare. For further discussions on the topic see Martin Lings, *The Secret of Shakespeare* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1984), chap. 9; Raymond B. Waddington, 'Antony and Cleopatra: "What Venus did with Mars"', *Shakespeare Studies*, 2 (1966), 210-27; and John Anson, 'Julius Caesar: The Politics of the Hardened Heart', *Shakespeare Studies*, 2 (1966), 11-33.

³⁵⁶ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 39.

³⁵⁷ ed. by David Wootton (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2005). All references to this edition.

³⁵⁸ Kenneth L. Golden, 'Myth, Psychology, and Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus"', *College Literature*, 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), 202-10 (p. 208).

suicide are devilish temptations that ought to be resisted. Faustus claims that ‘Hell calls for right, and with a roaring voice | Says “Faustus, come; thine hour is come...”’; as he takes the dagger, while telling Hell that he ‘will come to do thee right’, he shows his willingness to submit to the forces of evil. That Faustus has a choice regarding both despair and suicide is emphasised by the presence of the Old Man who begs Faustus to ‘stay [his] desperate steps’, ‘call for mercy, and avoid despair!’; it is the ‘Saviour sweet,’ he says, ‘Whose blood alone must wash away [Faustus’s] guilt’ (ll. 1315ff.). Faustus, however, disregards the saving power of Christ’s blood and instead uses his own blood to confirm his former vow to Lucifer (ll. 1338-39). In this respect, Marlowe explicitly presents the shedding of one’s own blood as a diabolical sin: Faustus refrains from suicide but he has sold his soul to the devil. At the end of the play, the character is dragged off to hell by demonic fiends in what could be considered as a metaphor for self-murder.

Similarly, in Sir Thomas More’s *A Dialogue of Comfort* the character of Anthony explains that ‘the devil tempteth a man to kill and destroy himself’ by giving him a vision which is ‘no true revelation, but a very false illusion’.³⁵⁹ This Christian perspective does not, however, occur in More’s earlier fictional work *Utopia*, a text that depicts and explores the political, religious and social construct of an imaginary island, and which presents voluntary euthanasia as an option for the terminally ill. In such instances, for the Utopians, a patient’s self-homicide would be considered as a great service to the country for the patient would otherwise become a burden.³⁶⁰ As the narrator relates:

[...] if any have torturing, lingering pain, without hope of recovery or ease, the priests and magistrates repair to them and exhort them, since they are unable to proceed with the business of life, are become a burden to themselves and all about them, and have in reality outlived themselves, they should no longer cherish a rooted disease, but choose to die since they cannot live but in great misery; being persuaded, if they thus deliver themselves from torture, or allow others to do it, they shall be happy after death. Since they forfeit none of the pleasures, but only the troubles of life

³⁵⁹ *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* ed. by Leland Miles (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 100-10.

³⁶⁰ See Green, ‘Suicide, Martyrdom, and Thomas More’, pp. 135-55.

by this, they think they not only act reasonably, but consistently with religion; for they follow the advice of their priests, the expounders of God's will. Those who are wrought upon by these persuasions, either starve themselves or take laudanum. But no one is compelled to end his life thus; and if they cannot be persuaded to it, the former care and attendance on them is continued. And though they esteem a voluntary death, when chosen on such authority, to be very honourable, on the contrary, if any one commit suicide without the concurrence of the priests and senate, they honour not the body with a decent funeral, but throw it into a ditch.³⁶¹

It is relevant to note that More's narrator only provides an account rather than a defence of this form of suicide, and that while he imagines such suicides as being permissible for Utopian humanists he at no point extends this to include Christians.³⁶² Despite More's orthodox stance on suicide in *A Dialogue of Comfort*, and indeed throughout his nonfictional works, the contentious nature of *Utopia* provided Reformers with an excuse to attack both More and the Catholic Church, the usual point being made 'that since More has once passed off fiction as truth, he is quite capable of continuing to do so—especially in religious controversy'.³⁶³ Such arguments dismissed any indication of irony in *Utopia*, and ignored the obvious point that, for More, voluntary euthanasia that is based on pagan philosophy could only ever exist within a fictional framework. If anything, by grounding the Utopian's theories in classical arguments, *Utopia* only serves to reinforce the idea that suicide cannot be justified within a Christian context.

Shakespeare, however, takes on the task in *Othello*. With a return to the eloquent verse used by the character before his degeneration into jealousy, Othello's suicide is presented ostensibly as a triumph of reason over passion – it is a noble action taken by one who, like the Roman, did nothing in hate 'but all in honour' (5.2.296):

Set you down this;
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk

³⁶¹ Arthur Cayley, the Younger, ed. *Memoirs of Sir Thomas More, &c.*, 2 vols (London: Cadell and Davis, 1808), II, pp. 102-103.

³⁶² Green, 'Suicide, Martyrdom, and Thomas More', p. 135.

³⁶³ Rainer Pineas, 'Thomas More's "Utopia" and Protestant Polemics', *Renaissance News*, 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1964), 197-201 (p. 197).

Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
 I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
 And smote him—thus.

He stabs himself

(5.2.350-55.)

Othello here subsumes both the 'self' and the 'other', the ally and the foe; the dispossession of the latter must necessarily mean the dispossession of the former. The term *felo de se* (felon of himself) embodies the idea that an individual who commits suicide is simultaneously a felon and a victim; the felon being both related to the victim and distinct from it. According to this concept, the felon represents the part of the individual that acts on the impulse to end her or his own life in spite of the other, more reasonable, part of her or himself. In *Othello*, the tragic hero's suicide is presented in Stoic terms, as a 'reverse' *felo de se* whereby the character is able to dislocate the felonious part of his character, which is 'wrought | Perplexed in the extreme' by passion, from the Venetian soldier who has become the victim and who confronts death in a rational manner.³⁶⁴ In transposing the notion of an honourable suicide from the Roman plays to *Othello*, Shakespeare seems to maintain the Stoic principal that 'so long as the decision to suicide is taken calmly and rationally [...] and does not involve the subjection of reason to the passions, it is to be allowed to the wise man'.³⁶⁵ Othello's final moments are spent focussing on his reputation, honour, stately service, and courtly love rather than on God and repentance, and his character, which embodies the Roman 'honour' of pagan tradition, is contrasted with Desdemona, a character of Christian virtue who is 'heavenly true' (5.2.131; 137).

³⁶⁴ In contrast to Othello's rationality, Roderigo, who is suffering from unrequited love, threatens melodramatically to 'incontinently drown' himself because it 'is silliness to live, when to live is torment' (1.3.301ff.).

³⁶⁵ John M. Rist, *The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 175. P. W. Van Der Horst, 'A Pagan Platonist and a Christian Platonist on Suicide', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 25, no. 4 (December 1971), 282-88, explores this philosophy in relation to the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, who developed the doctrine that a soul should be free from passion when leaving the body lest it remain corporeal, since a suicide committed in passion has the potential to defile the soul (p. 285). See also Eric Langley's discussion on Dante's self-murderers who reside in the sub-circle of the seventh circle of Hell, and who have 'rejected the God-given hybrid of body and soul' and are now 'locked into a new wooden corporeality' (Langley, pp. 192-94).

Othello's suicide is noble, we might argue, in so far as it fits David Seeley's model of the 'Noble Death'. Although Seeley's model is perhaps too stringent to be wholly convincing as a universal model, it does identify five key components that emerge in a wide range of noble deaths throughout Greco-Roman literature; a repertoire against which texts such as *Othello* might be measured. These components are as follows: vicariousness; obedience; a military context; the overcoming of physical vulnerability; and the sacrificial metaphor. That Othello's death is vicarious is demonstrated in his disassociation of the Self and the act as he describes his duty to avenge the state of Venice, which has been 'traduced' by a 'malignant and turbaned Turk'. Othello here presents himself as a model soldier who dies patriotically in a struggle to the death with the enemy. He wishes to make of himself an example. For this reason, Othello's act is also one of obedience to his country, which satisfies Seeley's second component. The military context is apparent in the metaphorical war waged by Iago on Othello, which replaces the literal war between the Venetians and the Turks for which the protagonist sets sail, and Othello's overcoming of physical vulnerability is evident at 5.2.257-64 in the contrast he draws between the fatal weapon and the mortal flesh of the 'soldier's thigh', the 'good sword' and his 'little arm'. As to the fifth component, there is no obvious sacrificial metaphor; however, as Seeley writes, this component is ancillary, and is not always present in the range of examples with which he works.³⁶⁶

Despite fitting Seeley's model of a 'Noble Death', Othello's death is problematic in that it is not befitting of a good, Venetian Christian.³⁶⁷ As a 'hybrid' character composed of both Christian and classical values, Othello's mind-set is that of a Roman soldier, but the passion that drives him to a sense of madness is associated with diabolical agency. In addition to Calvin's argument that self-homicide is an act of evil, Martin Luther presented madness

³⁶⁶ p. 81.

³⁶⁷ In 2.3.328 Iago mentions Othello's baptism. On Iago's subversion of Othello's Christianity, see Bryan Reynolds and Joseph Fitzpatrick, 'Venetia Ideology or Transversal power?: Iago's Motives and the Means by which Othello Falls', in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Philip C. Kolin (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 203-19 (pp. 208-9).

as a form of demonic possession. In Othello's fit of madness in 4.1.40, the character exclaims 'O, devil!' before falling down into a trance and in a show of remorse in 5.2.275 he cries 'Whip me, ye devils | From the possession of this heavenly sight'. Othello's passion has, of course, been induced by Iago, and when this becomes apparent Othello looks down towards Iago's feet expecting to see the cloven feet of the devil (5.2.284-85). Although the idea of Iago as a 'demi-devil' (5.2.299) reflects Othello's Christian views, Shakespeare leaves the matter open to interpretation: has Othello succumb to devilish temptation or has he been seduced by human malice? Is Iago's wickedness a product of evil or of human nature?

Due to the conflicting values in the play, it is difficult to discern whether Othello's suicide is supposed to be noble or sinful. In 5.2 the Moor is placed under suicide-watch because, as he himself notes, death is an easy way out: life is for suffering while 'tis happiness to die' (5.2.290-91). That Othello's self-homicide is sinful is reflected in Gratiano's comment on the Moor's last words, in the light of his suicide: 'All that's spoke is marr'd' (5.2.374). Furthermore, there is no mention of what kind of burial Othello will receive, which is unusual in the context of Shakespeare's noble death scenes. The disappointed response from the other characters concerning Othello's suicide indicates that there is no place for pagan philosophy within a Christian world.³⁶⁸ It is possible that Shakespeare either 1.) sought to capture in Othello's suicide the idea that the character ends as he began: by failing to fit in to a Christian world; or 2.) tried to redeem the tragic hero in his final moments but struggled to do so in having to frame a noble suicide within a Christian context. MacDonald and Murphy suggest that Othello's suicide draws on classical conventions because 'Great writers like Shakespeare seized on the irreconcilable demands of honour and faith to enrich the

³⁶⁸ If the play is legally accurate, Lodovico's instruction that Gratiano 'seize upon the fortunes of the Moor, | For they succeed to [him]' suggests that Othello has not been found guilty as a *felo de se*, since his possessions would have been seized by the state. For Shakespeare's knowledge of the legal term *felo de se* and the way in which he reflects popular attitudes towards the act of self-homicide, see B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A Dictionary* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 340-45.

thematic and psychological complexity of their depictions of suicide’ and that ‘the legitimacy of a suicide depended on the scene it ended’.³⁶⁹

But how do we judge the legitimacy of a suicide that takes place offstage and under ambiguous circumstances? Lady Macbeth ‘*as ‘tis thought*, by self and violent hands | Took off her life’ (5.9.36-37, my emphasis). If she did commit suicide, we would surely need to understand the reason for her actions, which would determine whether or not she may be considered as a sympathetic character; yet, there are a number of reasons as to why Lady Macbeth might have committed suicide. An obvious suggestion is that the character is driven to suicide by the devil.³⁷⁰ In 1.5 the character infamously calls on spirits to ‘fill [her], from the crown to the toe, top-full | Of direst cruelty’ (42-43). Perhaps they did. This interpretation would explain the drastic change in the character as she falls into insanity and probably takes her own life – but there is no solid evidence to prove that Lady Macbeth is possessed.³⁷¹ Nonetheless, in his nineteenth-century opera adaptation of *Macbeth*, Verdi magnified the role and diabolical nature of Lady Macbeth.³⁷² Having ‘deliberately transgressed the boundaries of *primo ottocento* opera’ during the sleepwalking scene, Verdi transforms ‘the traditional mad scene from a quintessential female moment into one of indeterminate gender’;³⁷³ such an interpretation aligns Lady Macbeth with the witches who themselves have an indeterminate gender, and assumes that the character has indeed been unsexed. Bernstein explains that in Verdi’s representation of 5.1, ‘when Lady Macbeth is instructed to “set the light down and start rubbing her hands as if to wipe away something” [Lady depone il lume e si sfrega le

³⁶⁹ Macdonald and Murphy, p. 99.

³⁷⁰ Joanna Levin, ‘Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria’, *English Literary History*, 69, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 21-55, notes that since women were viewed as the weaker sex they were often considered to be more susceptible to demonic possession (p. 29).

³⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that whether or not the evil spirits that Lady Macbeth calls upon ‘actually materialized, the conjuration of evil qualified as witchcraft’ according to the Witchcraft Statute of 1604 (Levin, p. 39). For the diabolical representation of Lady Macbeth in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century productions, see Jane A. Bernstein, ‘Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered’: Lady Macbeth, Sleepwalking, and the Demonic in Verdi’s Scottish Opera’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14, no. 1/2, *Primal Scenes: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of California, Berkeley*, 30 November-2 December, 2001 (Mar., 2002), 31-46.

³⁷² Bernstein, p. 35.

³⁷³ Bernstein, p. 45.

mani facendo l'atto di cancellare qualche cosa] the orchestra plays its demonic ascending scales'. It is interesting to note that in order for Verdi to portray Lady Macbeth as a diabolical character, the original text had to be cut, condensed and modified, and that the character's actions were to be accompanied by the said demonic ascending scales as well as 'disembodied gestures' that are absent in Shakespeare's stage directions.³⁷⁴ The idea of Lady Macbeth being driven by diabolical agency literalises the notion of external evil in the play, and places the text firmly in line with the Christian prohibition on suicide.

Yet, like the demonic woman, Joanna Levin argues, the hysteric also represented a disorderly female, and both were used during the early modern period as 'hegemonic inventions designed to exalt male rationality'.³⁷⁵ Levin refers to Lady Macbeth as an example of a woman whose hysteria merely imitates the signs of possession.³⁷⁶ If medical reasons are to be considered, however, then melancholy becomes a plausible motive as Macbeth instructs the doctor to 'Pluck from [her] memory a rooted sorrow' (5.3.41).³⁷⁷ Michael MacDonald notes that since evidence of 'melancholy moods was used by coroners' jurors and royal officials as proof that people had committed the ungodly, satanic act of self-murder' during the time, 'the medical explanation for suicide and the supernatural one were not necessarily contradicted'.³⁷⁸ Paul H. Kocher, however, dismisses the suggestion of melancholy and argues instead that 'Shakespeare is making it as plain as possible to his audience that Lady Macbeth's disastrous plight is due solely to remorse for the sin of her crimes'. Since conscience belongs to Christianity and melancholy belongs to Medicine, he argues, the Doctor 'implicitly rules out natural melancholia or madness as contributing causes, and so

³⁷⁴ Bernstein, p. 45.

³⁷⁵ p. 31.

³⁷⁶ pp. 21-55. The 'demonic woman and the hysteric', Levin writes, 'violated patriarchal ideals, but they validated misogynist accounts of an essentially corrupted female nature' (p. 29).

³⁷⁷ Kenneth Muir notes several references to melancholy in Macbeth and the Doctor's conversation in 5.3 (*Macbeth*, pp. 148-49). For the relationship between melancholy and the guilty conscience and this leading to suicide in the early modern period, see also Wright, 'The world's Worst Worm', p. 126.

³⁷⁸ 'The Medicalization of Suicide in England', p. 74.

must we'.³⁷⁹ Indeed, the character's exclamation of 1.5, 'Out, damned spot!' (33), as she struggles to wash her hands clean of imaginary blood while recounting the evening of Duncan's murder could indicate a tortured conscience. The metaphorical blood of this scene, which recalls Macbeth's guilt as he views the literal blood on his hands (2.2.59-63), could be interpreted as a manifestation of the character's guilt.

Finally, if Lady Macbeth did indeed kill herself, this may have been the result of madness itself. The doctor, on assessing Lady Macbeth, instructs the Waiting-Gentlewoman to 'Remove from her the means of all annoyance', indicating the potential for suicide. The idea that madness in itself could lead to suicide is voiced by Ariel in *The Tempest* who comments to Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio that 'I have made you mad; | And even with such-like valour men hang, and drown | Their proper selves' (III.iii.58-60). During the early modern period, it was unclear as to whether conditions such as insanity or hysteria were medical or diabolical, it was difficult to pass judgement on a self-homicide that had been committed in a state of madness. Tracing the 'confusion in Shakespeare's age about the circumstances under which *non compos mentis* [not of sound mind] verdicts might be justified', Michael MacDonald demonstrates that 'when juries before 1660 were presented with evidence of lunacy, they often displayed uncertainty about just what to do'.³⁸⁰ However, the doctor's assessment that Lady Macbeth's 'disease is beyond [his] practice' and that 'More needs she the divine than the physician' could either mean that the so-called 'disease' is a

³⁷⁹ 'Lady Macbeth and the Doctor', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1954), 341-46 (p. 345).

³⁸⁰ 'Ophelia's Maimèd Rites', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1986), 309-17 (p. 312). MacDonald goes on to explain that:

Prior to about 1660, the *non compos mentis* verdict was very seldom used. Among the coroners' inquisitions filed in the central courts between 1487 and 1660, only 1.6% of suicides were returned *non compos mentis*. Almost all the rest were dedared *felo de se*. Mistaking later practice for Elizabethan custom, Frye wrongly asserts that coroners' juries placed the "best construction" on evidence of mental illness and excused many suicides as lunatics.

(p. 300)

For further discussion on early modern views regarding mental disorders and suicide, see Mark Sacharoff, 'Suicide and Brutus' Philosophy in Julius Caesar', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33, no. 1 (January - March, 1972), 115-22 (p. 119).

spiritual matter, or simply that he has no medical understanding of insanity. Just as the doctor's mind is 'mated' on the matter so too is the reader's (5.1.55ff.).

This confusion regarding suicide and insanity is also reflected in the burial scene of *Hamlet*. Ophelia's death by drowning, which takes place offstage like Lady Macbeth's, obscures the character's intentionality or lack thereof. MacDonald notes that

Drowning was one of the most frequent causes of accidental death in Tudor and Stuart England, and it was obviously difficult in many cases to be sure that people found drowned in a pond or river had actually committed suicide. Juries nevertheless returned large numbers of drowned bodies as *felones de se*. Throughout the whole early modern period, drowning was the second most common cause of such deaths of women.³⁸¹

With this association between women and drowning, Roderigo's threat to drown himself for unrequited love indicates a lack of masculinity; as Iago replies, 'Come, be a man! Drown thyself? Drown cats and blind puppies!' (1.3.330-31). In this regard, Ophelia's supposed suicide by drowning suggests what would have been considered a weakness of her sex. The gravedigger questions whether Ophelia is 'to be buried in Christian burial, | When she wilfully seeks her own salvation?' (5.1.1-2), and the Priest comments that since her death 'was doubtful' she 'should in ground unsanctified [be] lodged | Till the last trumpet' (5.1.216ff.).³⁸² Such responses to Ophelia's death exemplify the attitude as found in contemporary canon and civil law, and suggest that despite—or, indeed, because of—her insanity, Ophelia's supposed suicide was intentional; this would make her culpable and therefore a *felo de se*, which is ironic considering that it is Hamlet rather than Ophelia who deliberates on suicide during the course of the play.³⁸³

The *felo de se* verdict for a drowning, which provided the state with an opportunity to make money from the family of the deceased, was, unsurprisingly, often contested by family

³⁸¹ MacDonald, 'Ophelia's Maimèd Rites', p. 311.

³⁸² For two excellent discussions on Ophelia's death see, MacDonald, 'Ophelia's Maimèd Rites', pp. 309-17, Barbara Smith, 'Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualising the Suicide of Ophelia', *Atlantic Review*, 73, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 96-112.

³⁸³ Andrew Hadfield, 'A Bare Bodkin', *Notes and Queries*, 62, no. 1 (March 2015), 111-112 (p. 112).

members.³⁸⁴ Laertes is sympathetic towards his sister's death and he defends her right to a Christian burial: 'I tell thee, churlish priest, | A ministering angel shall my sister be' (5.1. 229-30). In Laertes's defence of his sister, as well as in the sympathetic portrayal of Ophelia throughout the text, and specifically in her final song that ends with a prayer to God, Shakespeare appears to reject the idea that suicide and insanity are driven by the devil. The ambiguity inherent in the suicides of Lady Macbeth and Ophelia, whether deliberately or not, challenge the common perception in Elizabethan and early Jacobean England that mental incompetence cannot be considered as a mitigating circumstance for self-homicide.³⁸⁵ Although certain individuals in early modern society held the view that suicides were less excusable if they were brought about by overwhelming grief rather than diabolical agency,³⁸⁶ plays such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* portray the suicide's despair in a sympathetic manner. What makes these Christian suicides unusual is the suggestion that they could have been induced by psychological trauma, and that they are therefore forgivable or excusable. To attempt to rationalise Ophelia and Lady Macbeth's alleged suicides is to ignore the relevance of Shakespeare's ambiguity. With a suggestion that what has previously been viewed as diabolical may in fact be psychological, Shakespeare leaves the matter of suicide and insanity open to interpretation: he neither challenges nor conforms to established views, but rather represents the contemporary confusion on the matter.

III

One cannot write about John Donne and self-homicide without referencing the oft-remarked similarity between Hamlet's famous contemplation of suicide and the following letter that Donne wrote to his friend Sir Henry Goodere in September, 1608:

I have often suspected myself to be overtaken [...] with a desire of the next life: which though I know it is not merely out of a weariness of this, because I had yet I doubt worldly encumbrances have increased it. I would not that death should take me asleep. I would not have him merely seize

³⁸⁴ For the extent of financial loss faced by family members, see MacDonald and Murphy, pp. 15-28.

³⁸⁵ Smith, p. 102.

³⁸⁶ Smith, p. 102.

me, and only declare me to be dead, but win me, and overcome me. [...]. Therefore I would fain do something; but that I cannot tell what, is no wonder. For to choose, is to do: but to be no part of anybody, is to be nothing [...]. I am nothing, or so little, that I am scarce subject and argument good enough for one of mine own letters: yet I fear, that doth not ever proceed from a good root, that I am so well content to be less, that is dead. You, sir, are far enough from these descents, your virtue keeps you secure, and your natural disposition to mirth will preserve you; but lose none of these holds, a slip is often as dangerous as a bruise, and though you cannot fall to my lowness, yet in a much less distraction you may meet my sadness [...].³⁸⁷

That there is a similarity between the two texts is true to an extent. Both Hamlet and Donne associate their feelings of melancholy with a desire for death, and both express a hesitation or inability to act on their urge to commit self-homicide. Just as Hamlet's 'resolution' is 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought', so Donne, who 'would fain do something', is unable to resolutely state his intention to act. But the resemblance really ends there. For many of Shakespeare's noble characters, self-homicide is heroic because death and the afterlife are presented as fearful: Hamlet says that it is the 'dread of something after death' that makes 'cowards' of those individuals who 'bear the whips and scorns of time' simply because they are afraid to die (3.1.69ff.); Romeo fears that death is a 'lean abhorred monster' that will keep Juliet 'in dark to be his paramour' (5.3.113-14); and Brutus shows his nobility in the proclamation, 'I love | The name of honour more than I fear death' (1.2.88-89). For Donne, however, death and the afterlife are comforting rather than fearful,³⁸⁸ and so an inclination towards suicide is natural – even desirable. Thus, when he refers to the Roman suicides in *Biathanatos* I.ii.3, he does so not to praise their courage in overcoming death, but to provide evidence for his theory that 'in all ages, in all places, upon all occasions, men of all conditions' have affected the desire for death and inclined to kill themselves.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1899), I, pp. 190-191.

³⁸⁸ In "Disdaining life, desiring leave to die": Spenser and the Psychology of Despair (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2008), Paola Baseotto makes a similar case for the works of Edmund Spenser: 'Death pervades Spenser's texts not as a horrible and frightful presence as in most contemporary writings, but as a mirage, a temptation, an alternative to engagement' (p. 4).

³⁸⁹ Rudick and Battin comment that the 'burlesque' tone used in this section highlights that the desire of dying is natural and 'operative in all sorts of circumstances' (Rudick and Battin, pp. li-lii). Also, cf. *Death's Duell*, pp.

The contrast between Shakespeare and Donne's representations of death is illuminated in Margaret Edson's *Wit* by the character of Professor Evelyn Ashford who explains to her student the necessity of using a scholarly edition of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*. In her speech, Ashford distinguishes Donne's portrayal of death as a mere pause between life and the afterlife from Shakespeare's dramatic spectacle. I quote, at length, for the eloquence of the piece:

The sonnet ['Death be not proud'] begins with a valiant struggle with death calling on all the forces of intellect and drama to vanquish the enemy. But it is ultimately about overcoming the seemingly insuperable barriers separating life, death and eternal life. In the edition you chose, this profoundly simple meaning is sacrificed to hysterical punctuation. "And Death" capital D "shall be no more;" semi-colon. "Death," capital D, comma, "thou shalt die", exclamation mark. If you go in for this sort of thing I suggest you take up Shakespeare. Gardner's edition of the *Holy Sonnets* returns to the Westmoreland manuscript source of 1610. Not for sentimental reasons, I assure you, but because Helen Gardner is a scholar. It reads: "And death shall be no more," comma, "Death thou shalt die." Nothing but a breath, a comma separates life from life everlasting. Very simple, really. With the original punctuation restored, death is no longer something to act out on a stage with exclamation marks. It is a comma. A pause. In this way, the uncompromising way, one learns something from the poem, wouldn't you say? Life, death, soul, God, past, present. Not insuperable barriers. Not semicolons. Just a comma.³⁹⁰

While Hamlet fears those dreams that 'may come | When we have shuffled off this mortal coil' (3.1.65-6), Donne's speaker welcomes them, imagining that 'From rest and sleepe, which but [Death's] pictures bee, | Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow' (ll. 5-6). In Donne's poem, Death is neither 'Mighty' nor 'dreadfull' (l. 2). As a pitiful character that dwells with 'poyson, warre, and sicknesse' (l. 10), he is not a worthy adversary that can be overcome in the name of heroism or martyrdom; rather, he is a 'slave' to 'desperate men' (l. 9), used by them to alleviate their misery and suffering. Notably, the final phrase of the poem 'thou shalt die', which echoes the words spoken by God to Adam in Genesis 2:17, presents the idea that Death will be his own destruction and will consequently be a self-homicide; he

35-36: 'The ancient Romanes had a certain terdernesse and detestation of the name of death, they cold not name death, no, not in their wills'.

³⁹⁰ *Wit*, dir. by Mike Nichols (HBO Films, 2001).

is both slave to the desperate man, and the desperate man himself. Donne's pity towards Death in the poem echoes his pity towards those who commit self-homicide elsewhere. For example, it is stated in the 'Preface' to *Biathanatos* that individuals desperate enough to commit self-homicide should be treated in a charitable manner since '[t]hou knowest this man's fall, but thou knowest not his wrestling, which perchance was such that almost his very fall is justified and accepted of God'.³⁹¹

A man's struggle or intention cannot, *Biathanatos* argues, be judged by outward actions. Should an individual be taken prisoner and believe truly that self-homicide should be undertaken for the 'greater good', for instance, the law of nature cannot be said to have been transgressed in the affecting of this act; even if the individual were mistaken, the action does not negate the intention (I.ii.2). Donne further contends that just because an act is illegal this does not mean that it is evil or that it may be judged as such: the 'natural desire of dying' is so ubiquitous, he states, that customary laws against the deed have had to be enforced to prevent people from indulging in it, in much the same way that hunting and usury have had to be prohibited '*ne inescarentur homines* [lest men be tempted to it]'. In a similar manner, Donne mockingly asserts, Mohammed 'to withdraw his nation from wine, brought them to a religious belief that in every grape there was a devil' (II.iii.1). The idea of diabolical agency being used by authorities as a deterrent suggests that, in religion, it is possible that 'appeals to the supernatural' might be 'abused' by authorities to exert control over people and their actions; a thought that intimates Calvin's contention that self-homicide is driven by diabolical agency.³⁹² Yet Donne's criticism does not necessarily lie with the power wielded by authority figures to subdue subjects. Such laws are enforced, Donne maintains, to prevent men from exceeding in their natural desires: 'it is not a better understanding of nature which hath

³⁹¹ Cf. Donne, *Death's Duell*, p. 27: 'Stil pray wee for a peaceable life against violent death, & for time of repentance against sudden death, and for sober and modest assurance against distemperd and diffident death, but neuer make ill condusions vpon persons ouertaken with such deaths'.

³⁹² The quotation is taken from Rudick and Battin, p. 233.

reduced us from it, but the wisdom of lawmakers and observers of things fit for the institution and conservation of states' (II.iii.1). Prohibitions, like those against self-homicide, are not indicative of good and evil since they have been enforced to prevent the individual from acting on her or his natural impulses.³⁹³

In arguing that the act of self-homicide is 'misinterpretable' (to use Donne's own word) because the outward action may not reveal the inner intention, Donne undermines the credibility of the type of noble death found in classical literature and Christian martyrologies. His displacement of a typical noble death, which he then replaces with an un-noble death, is exemplified in his treatment of the love-suicide, a convention of 'courtly love that survived long after the cultural milieu in which [it] arose and flourished'.³⁹⁴ 'Love and death were inextricably linked in Renaissance tragedy', MacDonald and Murphy note, and the love-suicide was still considered as an 'ennobling act': in the hermetic world of courtly values, suicide could become an act of transcendent self-sacrifice, and the pangs experienced by lovers betrayed or abandoned excused even deaths that were motivated by despair'.³⁹⁵ Eric Langley further argues that the loss of the self when one falls in love is tantamount to suicide.³⁹⁶ In relation to *Romeo and Juliet*, he explains that the 'generosity of love, necessitating the payment of privacy for the purchase of indivisible identity, is understood as an act of self-renunciation prefigured by the renunciation of one's name and perfected in the renunciation of one's life: "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised; | Henceforth I never will be Romeo" (II. II. 50-51)'.³⁹⁷ The gaining of a 'shared identity' here necessitates the act

³⁹³ Cf. 'The Prohibition', in which Donne's speaker explains to his listener that he has forbidden her the 'extremes' (l. 18) of love and hate so as to save her from her own frustration or demise.

³⁹⁴ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 100.

³⁹⁵ MacDonald and Murphy, p. 100.

³⁹⁶ p. 133.

³⁹⁷ p. 129.

of self-negation.³⁹⁸ For Donne, however, reciprocal love engenders an exaltation, not a destruction, of the self, and the loss of love becomes a metaphor for an un-noble death.³⁹⁹

The exaltation of love is presented in a poem such as 'The Sun Rising', in which the speaker presents the idea that he and his lover have acquired new, individual statuses that enable them to rival, and eventually replace, the external world: 'She's all states, and all princes I; | Nothing else is' (ll. 21-22). The lovers sacrifice not themselves but everything else. Similarly, in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' the lovers' two souls 'which are one' (l. 21) overcome separation by expanding 'Like gold to aery thinness beat' (l. 24). The speaker presents the well-known compass-circle image to urge his lover to be faithful while they are parted, since he will only be able to run the full course of the circle if she, the fixed foot of the compass, stays in place (ll. 26-8). Thus, even though the points of the pair of compasses are separate from one another, its highest point is where they are joined - at the point that is nearest to heaven. Here, the unity of the lovers' souls has the power to overcome physical separation because romantic love brings them to the edge of divinity. The loss of love, however, results in self-destruction, as is exemplified in 'The Expiration':

So, so, break off this last lamenting kiss,
Which sucks two souls, and vapours both away.
Turn thou, ghost, that way, and let me turn this,
And let ourselves benight our happiest day:
We asked none leave to love, nor will we owe
Any so cheap a death as saying, 'Go'.

Go; and, if that word have not quite killed thee,
Ease me with death, by bidding me go too.
Oh, if it have, may my word work on me,
And a just office on a murd'rer do—

³⁹⁸ Langley, p. 130.

³⁹⁹ Although the topic of the love-suicide has been well-researched in relation to both early modern and medieval literature, Donne has been largely excluded from the discussion. Certainly, there is a wealth of criticism concerning the interrelationship of love and death in Donne's poems, and certainly there is a small, but sturdy, body of criticism on suicide in *Biathanatos*, but only one study to date, to my knowledge, uses Donne's prose theories of suicide at length to reflect specifically on allusions to, or examine explicit depictions of, suicide in the poetry. The study to which I refer is Neal Migan, 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', *Prose Studies*, 29, no. 3 (2007), 378-93. This article, which is driven by assertion, rather than textual analysis, lacks credibility, however. For a better understanding of the foundation of Migan's argument, the reader is directed to the source of the article, Migan's doctoral dissertation: 'Anxious Martyr: John Donne and the Literature of Self-Sacrifice' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 2004), *ProQuest Digital Dissertations Web* [accessed 20 August 2016].

Except it be too late to kill me so,
Being double dead: going, and bidding go!

Whereas, for Langley, the linguistic echoes throughout *Romeo and Juliet* mimic the act of reciprocation, this poem uses linguistic echoes to signify separateness.⁴⁰⁰ These echoes emerge from linguistic and structural doubleness: there are two stanzas, which mimic each other in form and structure; there are repetition-doubles in ‘So, so’ and ‘Go; | Go’; references to ‘two’ and ‘both’; an iambic pentameter that is perfectly split in half, with two ghosts moving away from each other like a reflection in a mirror; and, most significantly, the double death of the final line. Such echoes might adhere to what Langley finds to be an ‘irresistible power of sympathetic attraction’ that prefigures the love-suicide, and the compression of several meanings in the word ‘Expiration’ in the title could be said to cause the word itself to ‘divide and suicidally self-antagonize’.⁴⁰¹ Yet, it is essential to note that the double suicide of Donne’s poem is not a reciprocal, dialogical act committed by both lovers, like that of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, but two suicides committed by one speaker in a dramatic monologue.

Instead of uniting the lovers, Donne’s echoes reinforce the theme of separateness as the repetition of words draws attention to their very singularity. Although the stanzas mimic each other in structure, they contrast each other in content: the coupling of ‘two’, ‘Both’, ‘our’, and ‘we’ of the first stanza breaks down into the individual ‘mee’ in the second stanza; the ethereal imagery of souls, vapours and ghosts in the first becomes worldly imagery of murder and death in the second. Unlike ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, in which the speakers goes but bids his lover stay, ‘The Expiration’ portrays a separation that is far more final than a physical parting; it explores the consequences of broken love – the breaking of a

⁴⁰⁰ pp. 108-35.

⁴⁰¹ p. 115. The title of the poem can be understood in multiple ways as the action of breathing out; as the action of breathing one’s last breath; or as a termination of ‘something made to last a certain time’ such as a truce (*OED* ‘expiration’, 1a, 4 and 5, 5a, respectively). The first indicates the leaving of the soul (l. 2), the second indicates the act of dying, and the third indicates a relationship that has ended in accordance with a presupposed expectation. Each of these suggest a different type of death.

reciprocal kiss, the act of ‘going, and bidding, goe’.⁴⁰² The exalted Self of the reciprocal love poems is here replaced by a Self that deteriorates to the point of self-murder. Thus, by the end of the poem, the speaker claims that he is already dead. The interlacing references throughout the poem to dying, attempted murder, murder, a plea to be murdered/euthanasia and, eventually, self-murder, make it difficult to pinpoint the precise moment(s) of the speaker’s death(s). The speaker’s proposal that he and his lover should ‘let’ themselves ‘benight’ their happiest day attributes death-agency to the poem’s participants, and this is furthered by the speaker’s euthanasic request that his lover ease him with death (l. 8). The weapon to be used is the word ‘goe’, and this weapon has a similar effect to that of poison (‘let my word worke on mee’). It is not until l. 6 that the word ‘goe’ is used, but the idea of ‘going, and bidding, goe’ reflects l. 3 as the speaker instructs his lover to turn her ghost one way while he turns his ghost the other. The poem is sometimes entitled ‘Valediction’ or ‘Valedictio Amoris’, and this is a form used by Donne to explore the events of leave-taking or death as they play out in real time.⁴⁰³ In this sense, the poem portrays, in real time, the speaker’s act of suicide.

John Carey argues that ‘The Expiration’ is ‘the kind of poem which helped keep Donne alive by giving scope to his suicidal fantasies’.⁴⁰⁴ Due to Donne’s preoccupation with death in his works, some critics have come to the conclusion that Donne himself was suicidal. Neal Migan echoes Carey’s psycho-biographical methodology and argues that Donne’s poetic deaths ‘always indicate the passion and confusion with which Donne approached the topic of death, and a majority of them speak to Donne’s irrepressible desire to martyr himself

⁴⁰² Targoff argues that Donne draws on the ‘soul-in-the-kiss’ conceit of Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, in which a kiss is described as a spiritual transaction. In this poem, ‘Donne reverses the courtly tradition’ as ‘the kiss serves as the agent of death’. *John Donne: Body and Soul* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 61-62. It is perhaps not the kiss itself that is the cause of death in the first instance, as Targoff suggests, but the breaking off of the kiss – the action that demonstrates the speaker’s intention of ‘going, and bidding, goe’ (l. 12).

⁴⁰³ Targoff, p. 62.

⁴⁰⁴ p. 215.

through self-sacrifice'.⁴⁰⁵ Describing Donne's oeuvre as a 'literature of self-sacrifice', which constitutes 'a martyrology with emphases and exempla similar to those found in the collections of Foxe, John Bale, and others', Migan presents the unusual argument that Donne martyrs his poetic personas in the interest of 'eulogizing and glorifying himself in an act of self-aggrandizement' because he '*deemed himself* a martyr'.⁴⁰⁶ Furthermore, when Donne died, he assumed 'for himself the role of pseudo-martyr', having removed 'those portions of himself, the psychic portions of his ego, which obstructed his path to glory'.⁴⁰⁷ Questions must be raised about such an argument, not least because Migan's psycho-biographical methodology exhibits a range of shortcomings.⁴⁰⁸ Most importantly, Migan's conception of Donne's views on martyrdom, in particular that Donne was driven to martyrdom by a desire for self-glorification, contradicts a number of essential concepts that Donne develops throughout his preordination prose – the most significant of which is that a person is not entitled to seek glory in death or put themselves forward for the title of martyrdom.

Although it can be argued that Donne did, eventually, commit a type of suicide, there are two points that need to be taken into consideration before judging Donne's actions in the light of the arguments that he presents in the preordination prose; an approach that Migan appears to take. First, Donne takes care to distinguish between different types of

⁴⁰⁵ 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', p. 390.

⁴⁰⁶ 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', p. 387; p. 385, respectively. See also Donald Ramsay Robert, 'The Death Wish of John Donne', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 62, no. 4 (Dec., 1947), 958-76, who argues that in his life and preparation for death Donne modelled himself on Saint Stephen. Although I hope that the previous chapters have done enough to dispute the idea that Donne would put so much faith in an earthly authority, the reader is directed to the following article which presents an excellent argument on Donne's resistance to the allure of hero worship: Klause, pp. 181-215.

⁴⁰⁷ Migan, 'Anxious Martyr', p. 179.

⁴⁰⁸ Migan's approach, which is to work from the end of Donne's life backwards, reads too great a continuity into Donne's life ('Apologia Pro Vita Sua', pp. 378-79; 'Anxious Martyr', pp. 9-10). Although Migan daims that his approach is not teleological, his method is to look backwards from a set interpretation of Donne's death, and then to read Donne's texts through the lens of that death ('Anxious Martyr', p. 9). Note, in particular, his statement that Donne's *oeuvre* is meant to function as 'unqualified proof of Donne's worthiness of martyrdom', and that 'it exists as a ready-made testament arguing his case' so that 'even though he never died a martyr's death, he uses the prose works to eulogize himself as if he had' ('Apologia Pro Vita Sua', p. 378). Migan uses the present tense ('he *uses* the prose works') to describe an action taken by Donne *after* he had died. Additionally, Migan finds that Donne's 'passing was indeed the crowning experience of his life and its splendor and pageantry attest to the idea that he had been imagining and crafting his own martyrdom from an early age' ('Apologia Pro Vita Sua', p. 382).

suicides, and this highlights an issue regarding the slippage of terminology in Migan's article, whereby Donne's death is described variously and interchangeably as a 'passive suicide', a 'self-sacrifice', a 'martyrdom', and a 'pseudo-martyrdom'.⁴⁰⁹ According to Izaak Walton, Donne was consulted on the matter of his health during his final days, and was informed that

*by Cordials, and drinking milk twenty dayes together, there was a probability of his restauration to health; but he passionately denied to drink it. Nevertheless, Dr. Fox, who loved him most intirely, wearied him with sollicitations, till he yielded to take it for ten dayes; at the end of which time, he told Dr. Fox, he had drunk it more to satisfie him, than to recover his health; and that he would not drink it ten dayes longer upon the best moral assurance of having twenty years added to his life, for he loved it not; and that he was so far from fearing death, which is the King of terrors, that he longed for the day of his dissolution.*⁴¹⁰

In *Biathanatos* Donne states that wearing oneself out by fasting, which would be an act of deserting oneself, is tantamount to suicide: 'it is wayward and unnoble stubbornness in argument to say still, I must not kill myself but I may let myself die, since [...] the one implies and enwraps the other' (II.vi.5). He continues, however, to emphasise that an 'outward act' may not be judged as right or wrong in and of itself: 'if I forbear to swim in a river and so perish,' he states ironically, 'because there is no act I shall not be guilty; and I shall be guilty if I discharge a pistol upon myself which I knew not to be charged, nor intended harm, because there is an act' (II.vi.5). Donne's death, according to his own argument in *Biathanatos*, is a suicide, not a pseudo-martyrdom. It is an act that, being devoid of an explicit political content or open defiance to the state, is 'misinterpretable' to all but the man himself and God.

Evidently, therefore, one cannot speak of 'pseudo-martyrdom' and 'passive suicide' synonymously: within Donne's thought, the two are clearly distinguished. Migan's argument about Donne bears more than a passing resemblance to the argument made by the speaker

⁴⁰⁹ Migan, 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', pp. 380-82.

⁴¹⁰ 'The Life of John Donne', in *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert* (London, 1670), sig. F5v. Walton's account has not always been considered to be a wholly reliable source. See, for example, Flynn, *Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, p. 198, n. 20.

of 'The Flea' who ridicules his listener for having performed a type of pseudo-martyrdom: she has 'triumph[ed]' in her own 'self-murder' for the sake of her 'maidenhead'. The humour of the poem arises from the speaker's playful assertion that it would be more sinful for the lady to refuse his invitation for sexual intercourse—a sin which is equivalent to murder on three counts, including homicide, suicide and insecticide—than it would be for her to forsake her chastity. The idea that she has committed 'sacrilege, three sins in killing three' (l. 18), and the question of whether she has 'Purpled [her] nail, in blood of innocence' (l. 20), suggests that her killing of the flea resembles the killing of the Holy Trinity and of Christ, respectively.⁴¹¹ Similar to those who risk execution by denying the Jacobean oath of allegiance because they—falsely, according to Donne—fear that this will lead to damnation, so, the speaker argues, the woman's 'false fears' (l. 25) would expose her to, what is described in *Pseudo-Martyr* as, 'certaine ruine, vpon vncertaine foundations' (*PM*, sig. Hh4r). However, unlike the Jesuits who are presented in *Pseudo-Martyr* as defying the state and threatening to destroy the very essence of Christianity, the lady's act of allegedly committing 'three sins in killing three' is devoid of a political content. Much of the humour of the poem is, in fact, centred around the speaker's overstatement that the lady has destroyed the very foundation of Christianity in refusing his sexual advances.

A key component of the argument against pseudo-martyrdom that Donne applies to the Jesuits in *Pseudo-Martyr*, and that Donne's speaker (mis)applies to his listener, that, although the choice to commit suicide is both available and compelling, human beings are obliged to choose life over death. Man's inclination towards self-homicide throughout history is acknowledged in chapter I of *Pseudo-Martyr*, which states that the desire for suicide 'was so inhaerent and rooted, and had so overgrowne our nature, or that corruption which

⁴¹¹ Rebecca Ann Bach argues that in 'The Flea', 'along with the references to "sinne" and "shame," the lovers' bloods are "doistered" in the flea's body, and the beloved's killing of the flea resembles the martyrdom of the innocent', in '(Re)placing John Donne in the History of Sexuality', *English Literary History*, 72, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 259-89 (p. 271).

depraves it' that even such writers as Thomas More and Plato, who generally argue that suicide is not permitted under any circumstance, 'have flattered our corruption so much, as to appoint certain cases and reasons, and circumstances, in which it might be lawfull to kill ones selfe' (*PM*, sig. E4v). Donne is here referring to More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Laws IV*, where the former excuses euthanasia and the latter excuses individuals suffering from great pain, although he goes further than both. For Donne, the urge to kill oneself is so natural that it needs to be actively resisted. In his 1608 letter to Goodere, quoted above, Donne expresses a death wish but does not state how he would kill himself because, he says, 'to choose, is to do'. This statement correlates with an explanation provided in chapter V of *Pseudo-Martyr*, that 'Lanyers teach vs, that the word *Potest* [he can], *doth often signifie Actum* [he does]' (sig. Bb1v), and indicates that once the option to perform an unlawful act is made available, the threat of the act being performed is imminent. To 'choose' a method of self-destruction, for Donne, would be to admit that he 'can' kill himself and consequently mean that he 'does' perform the deed. The comfort of death and the 'desire of the next life' is a temptation that must be resisted. As Donne writes in the 'Preface' to *Biathanatos*: 'whensoever any affliction assails me, methinks I have the keys of my prison in mine own hand, and no remedy presents itself so soon to my heart as mine own sword' (p. 39). Life in this respect is presented as a prison sentence which man 'serues for his freedome' by enduring the 'persecutions' and 'crosses of this life'. Thus, instead of seeking death, man must 'be content to serue God' in the 'lower ranke and Order', which entails suffering on earth (sig. F2v). Such suffering and persecutions, Donne writes, 'are not onely part of the Martyrdome, but they are part of the reward' as they 'nourish our spirituall growth' (*PM*, sig. F2r).

The explicit link between suffering, vulnerability and martyrdom in Donne's work is nowhere better illustrated than in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1623).⁴¹²

⁴¹² *Devotions* is an autobiographical work, composed during a time when the author was suffering from a life-threatening illness. There is no surviving manuscript of the work and so the first of the five editions printed during the seventeenth century, entered into the Stationers Register on 9 January 1624, has served as a copy

Like *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*, *Devotions* explores the vulnerability of the fallen, human condition, and reinforces an implicitly Catholic perspective of salvation whereby the ultimate deliverance may be lost through sin but regained through penance. Establishing that the body's physical signs of weakness indicate a diseased soul, since mortality is the result of Original Sin, Donne states that he has fallen 'sick of *Sin*'. His suffering is presented as frightful, not due to a fear of death but because the speaker is, in his weakened state, vulnerable before God:

I lie here possessed with that fear which is thy [God's] fear, both that this sickness is thy immediate correction, and not merely a natural accident, and therefore fearful, because it is a fearful thing to fall into thy hands [...]
(Expostulation VI)

This idea of sickness as God's visitation, Jonathan Goldberg states, was a theme pervading 'all prayer books, no matter of what type or subgenre' at the time.⁴¹³ Such suffering, which makes dynamic the relationship between man and God, is a 'correction' that forms part of man's '*daily bread*' and provides the possibility of withdrawing from sin through penance (Prayer VII). Being the point at which the soul is exposed to God's judgement, sickness is thus presented as a spiritual experience that, along with the process of recovery, 'comes to

text for subsequent editions. Although Donne's illness remains unknown, it has been suggested that his symptoms could have been consistent with typhus or the seven-day fever. See *John Donne: Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. by Anthony Raspa (Montreal; London, 1975), p. xiv. The work takes the form of devotional prose, which may have found its influence in the *Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. Anthony Raspa argues convincingly, however, that it is not readily apparent who Donne's influences were, since *Devotions* does not appear to conform to seventeenth-century meditative practices (*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, pp. xxv-xxvi). There are twenty-three devotions in total, each representing one day of illness. In terms of structure, each section follows a simple Trinitarian pattern of Meditation, Expostulation and Prayer: the Meditation deals with the relationship between man and nature; the Expostulation explores the soul's susceptibility to sin; and the Prayer is concerned with divinity. It is possible that Donne was emulating in each devotion the structure of *Biathanatos* as derived from Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, which is divided into three parts: the Law of Nature, the Law of Reason, and the Law of God. The idea of each Meditation is developed in twofold measure, firstly in the Expostulation and the Prayer, which complicates and then resolves an individual point respectively, and secondly in the themes that emerge across the scope of the Meditations. These key concepts are glossed in the Latin headnotes that occur at the beginning of every devotion, and which function as an 'unusual narrative guide to the experience unfolded in the devotions'. The quotation is taken from Arshagouni, Mary, 'The Lating "Stationes" in John Donne's "Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions"', in *Modern Philology*, vol. 89, no. 2 (1991), pp. 196-210 (p. 209).

⁴¹³ 'The Understanding of Sickness in Donne's Devotions', in *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter, 1971), pp. 507-17 (p. 508).

stand for and reveal divine strength made perfect through weakness'.⁴¹⁴ As Mary Ann Lund argues, in the *Devotions* 'the experience of illness is reinscribed, precisely and paradoxically, as "spirituall recovery", where physical suffering leads to penitence and forgiveness', and the convalescence period is 'a time and place of physical vulnerability when one can look backwards and forwards, reflecting on the fragility and instability of the human state'.⁴¹⁵

The necessity of falling 'sick of *Sin*' and recovering from this state is not just to be reserved for periods of physical illness. The 'Crowne of Martyrdome', Donne contends, is to be merited by those who '*die daily*' after the example of St Paul, and who, in this act of 'dying to self', maintain a heightened awareness of her or his fallen state and strive daily to desist from sin and practice repentance (*PM*, sig. F2r).⁴¹⁶ The suffering of these 'manifold deaths' in the process of sanctification is illustrated in Donne's final sermon, *Deaths Duell*, which portrays the foetus in the womb that is 'taught cruelty, by being fed with blood', and which 'may be damned' though it be never born: 'Our very birth and entrance into this life' is 'an issue from death, for in our mothers wombe wee are dead'.⁴¹⁷ The womb that nurtures the beginning of life comes to symbolise a 'house of death' or a 'grave'.⁴¹⁸ This image literalises the notion of mortality, whereby Original Sin is transmitted in the begetting of flesh from flesh. In order to rise from one's sinful state, a Christian is required, throughout her or his life, to die to self in a perpetual symbol of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection:

Our birth dyes in infancy, and our infancy dyes in youth, and youth and the rest dye in age, and age also dyes, and determines all. Nor doe all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth arise so, as a Phoenix out of the ashes of another Phoenix formerly dead, but as a waspe or a serpent out of a caryon, or as a Snake out of dung.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁴ Mary Ann Lund, 'Donne's Convalescence', in *Renaissance Studies* (Aug., 2016; DOI: 10.1111/rest.12246), p. 3.

⁴¹⁵ 'Donne's Convalescence', pp. 7; 2, respectively.

⁴¹⁶ On the relationship between suffering and martyrdom in the early modern period, see Monta, p. 117.

⁴¹⁷ Donne, *Deaths Duell*, pp. 6; 5, respectively.

⁴¹⁸ Donne, *Deaths Duell*, p. 9.

⁴¹⁹ Donne, *Deaths Duell*, pp. 11-12.

The path of sanctification, which requires constant transformations and changes, rather than a reaffirmation of one's faith as a 'Phoenix out of the ashes', indicates that the conscience should be kept in a state of flux. Real strength, Donne argues, lies not in religious confidence but in the ability to rise up from one's sins through repentance.

Thus, for Donne, it is neither the cause nor the death that makes the martyr. In presenting voluntary death as a central element of pseudo-martyrdom, Donne develops a conception of martyrdom which is at once more personal and less 'political'. The possibility of consummate martyrdom is never denied by Donne, but the conditions he lays down for its attainment mean that not only is it unnecessary due to the established position of Christianity itself, but also that Man is almost certainly too fallen to ever truly act in perfect Christ-like charity. A noble or voluntary death cannot therefore act as shorthand for the entire discourse of martyrdom, as early modern martyrologies may have implied. Rather, for Donne, it is the politically obedient subject and penitent mind that come to signify martyrdom. The suffering body gives way to the obedient body, and the primacy of the courageous mind in the noble death, which impelled classical figures and voluntary martyrs to seek death for their beliefs, gives way to the ideal of a 'depoliticised' and God-fearing conscience.

Conclusion

*Donne's religious prose, both in Pseudo-Martyr and elsewhere, is perfectly compatible with his claim that he had surveyed the controversy and made a deliberate choice. That he had a residual attachment to the old faith and a fellow-feeling for Catholics is beyond doubt, but if there was a betrayal, in his mind it was Rome's betrayal of the foundations of the faith: the Creeds, the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Councils and the Fathers.*⁴²⁰

In *Pseudo-Martyr*, John Donne develops a conception of martyrdom that is inseparable from his broader concerns regarding the foundation of true faith and the stability of the state. While the church is accorded a sister earthly authority alongside the state, Donne often posits 'true religion' against the teachings and actions of the church, and as such draws a distinction between Christianity, which is divine, and the fallible, manmade institution that is the church (in particular, although not exclusively, the Roman Church). 'Religion' and 'church' are thus not synonymous within Donne's thought. In disarticulating the elements of the early modern martyrial archetype—religious confidence, resistance and voluntary death—from martyrdom, and in fact rearticulating these as central components of *pseudo*-martyrdom, Donne uproots the conventions that were passing backwards and forwards between early modern martyrologies. Indeed, Donne's act of disarticulation is also an act of revelation: it demonstrates the extent to which an apparent discursive and institutional unity or whole, such as martyrdom, is necessarily contingent and composed of a variety of other discursive elements which, when rearticulated or subjected to challenge, can give rise to contestatory refashionings, which can propose an alternative overarching and integrating set of practices and ideas. This is not to suggest that writers have the singular capacity to create or dismantle any structure or set of seemingly necessarily connected discourses, but that existing elements can be refashioned or redeployed, and that this act could, for Donne, permit the advocacy of alternative religious and political possibilities.

⁴²⁰ Houliston, 'Apology', p. 483.

Thus, Donne is able to place greater emphasis on political as opposed to religious identifications, with recusancy and conformism becoming the dominant terms within his preferred binary. While religion remains inscribed within these terms, it is in a more focused form, with the Society of Jesus, in particular, but also radical Protestantism, being placed outside of the conformist camp, and the simple focus on the unity of politics and religion in the more dominant Catholic/Protestant opposition being denied. In reserving martyrdom for those who seek to preserve the foundation of Christianity (and not manmade incarnations thereof), and coupling this with the necessity of repentance and acting solely for the glorification of God (as opposed to any church), Donne denies the title of martyr to church militants, and in particular to counter-Reformation militants. In so doing, Donne removes a potent political weapon from the arsenal of those opposed to the state: rather than martyrs, these militants can only ever be pseudo-martyrs.

In explicating this argument throughout the present study, I have attempted to demonstrate that *Pseudo-Martyr* was not only crafted as a response to the controversy induced by the Jacobean oath of allegiance, but that it utilised current events as a site on which to construct broader arguments relating to conformity and salvation. The wider purpose of the many thoughts and discussions that constitute the foundation of *Pseudo-Martyr* becomes apparent when assessing the ways in which these arguments, explored within a public polemic, interconnect with the ideas explored in the unpublished *Biathanatos* and anonymously published *Ignatius His Conclave*. In examining the extensive theories that develop both within and across these prose works, we are able to establish a framework of religio-political ideas that can provide a valuable point of reference for identifying and interpreting related themes within Donne's *oeuvre* – particularly in works that draw on such ideas in an implicit or less direct manner. In the present study I have concentrated on Donne's theories of martyrdom and pseudo-martyrdom, and have included a small selection of works that I felt were directly relevant to the advancement of my argument. There are, however, many

other motifs, comparisons and avenues that warrant further investigation. The most prominent of these possibilities, to my mind, is the capacity to use Donne's theories of self-destruction in *Biathanatos* to examine the themes of self-sacrifice, as well as the convention of the love-death, in his *Songs and Sonnets*. Indeed, although Donne clearly has unique and ground-breaking thoughts on the matter of suicide that could be used to shed light on related ideas within his poetry, there has only been one lengthy discussion on this topic to date, and it remains unpublished.⁴²¹

There is also significant potential for future research into the placement of the preordination prose within Donne's biography, as well as in assessing their role in the progression of his religio-political thought across the years. Indeed, if Donne uses the Jacobean oath as a vehicle to drive larger arguments that he sustained or developed throughout his life and works, then it is certainly worth exploring how these arguments are shaped around other significant historical events – and, by extension, how oath literature transformed as a genre up until the Civil War. Does *Pseudo-Martyr*'s case for conformity, for instance, withstand the shift from Jacobean to Caroline England? Or are there fundamental shifts in Donne's argument too? Establishing a firmer basis for evaluating the preordination prose alongside the sermons would allow an insight into how specific contextual events, those sites on which literary themes or political debates could be generated or advanced, put pressure on, or influenced the shaping of, central ideas in early modern England.

The points here raised for further interrogation are befitting of the recent developments within Donne Studies. With the *Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne*, the *Oxford Edition of the Letters of John Donne*, and the John Donne Society Digital Prose Project all underway, much of the previously neglected prose works are being brought to light: works that, along with their critical exegeses, are bound to challenge and transform our vision of a man who was, amongst other things, a poet, a preacher, a political writer, and a thinker. In

⁴²¹ Migan, 'Anxious Martyr'.

giving priority to the prose works, these new resources have the capacity to provide a significant frame of reference for future investigations into *Pseudo-Martyr*, *Biathanatos* and *Ignatius His Conclave*.

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