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# Donne's Body

NANCY SELLECK

Donne scholarship has often grappled with his urgent fixation on the body—his habit of expressing even abstract or spiritual ideas in physiological terms. In sermons, for instance, Donne speaks of the soul as having blood and bones, of the “bowells” of the spirit, and of sin as a whole organic bodily system. He also explicitly contends that soul and body are one, and that “all that the soule does, it does in, and with, and by the body.”<sup>1</sup> Accounting for this striking materialism in a variety of ways, many critics nevertheless agree that Donne’s preoccupation with the body is a form of self-absorption or “egotism.”<sup>2</sup> They read his emphatic physicality as a powerful assertion of self, motivated by a great desire for control. John Carey, for instance, sees the aim of Donne’s physical imagery as a self-assertive “intensity”—an effort to make “his inner self . . . sound concentrated and vehement.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Elaine Scarry argues that Donne is after the materiality of language (“its capacity to mime, and perhaps eventually acquire, the actual weight of what it describes”), because he wants to carry “language into the body” and thereby make that body “volitional” and “noncontingent.”<sup>4</sup> Again, the idea is that Donne’s focus on the body is all about self-will, power, autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

But such arguments ignore the fact that the body Donne invokes—explicitly and knowledgeably—is a humoral body.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is often at odds with the model of individual selfhood implied in these discussions. While it prevailed, humoralism offered a radically different model of physical selfhood than we are accustomed to—particularly, a different sense of the relationship between the body and the external world. Highly permeable and

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thus subject to—even composed of—its environment, the humoral body suggests a material embeddedness of self and surround. To talk about this body, then, is not simply to talk about self—at least not the more self-contained, independent self that modern conceptions of the body suggest. In fact, with his constant focus on *disease* and *digestion*, Donne likes to evoke a sense of selfhood that is never securely bounded. It has the same structure, I suggest, as the Bakhtinian grotesque—a structure that enmeshes and incorporates the self with the body and the body with the rest of the world. Thus, Donne's humoralism makes his physical imagery not the means of self-involvement or self-assertion, but a way of representing the self's connection and even subjection to *other* bodies and minds.

Donne's conscious engagement with the paradigms and practices of humoral medicine is part of a wider ethical debate over changing conventions of selfhood in his time. The language of humors figures prominently in that debate, and this essay looks at some of that discourse in order to suggest how varied and contested such ideas were. But my main focus here is on its persistent presence in Donne's texts, which render some vivid analyses of what humoral selfhood could mean.<sup>7</sup> Explored in detail, Donne's humoral imagery not only challenges the widespread view of his own "individualism," but also complicates recent critical discussions of Renaissance selfhood in general.

### THE HUMORAL PARADIGM

Many Renaissance writers recognize profound implications for selfhood in humoral physiology. Thomas Browne, for instance, writes that "we are what we all abhorre, *Anthropophagi* and *Canibals*, devourers not onely of men, but of our selves; and that not in an allegory, but a positive truth; for all this masse of flesh that wee behold, came in at our mouths; this frame wee looke upon, hath beene upon our trenchers; In brief, we have devoured our selves, and yet doe live and remayne our selves."<sup>8</sup> What Browne rehearses here in deliberately paradoxical terms is the basic humoral understanding of the body as ever newly made up of its physical context, which it takes in and converts to itself. The humors (blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile) are the product of the body's digestion of food, which is transformed into chyle in the stomach and then further concocted (i.e., cooked) into the humors in the liver.<sup>9</sup> Not just blood, but all four humors travel through the veins nourishing the body; indeed, the parts of the

body are said to be generated from them. Browne's self-cannibalizing notion is a rhetorically extreme way of capturing the relationship of the humoral body to itself and to its world—its ongoing process of being remade by what it consumes and digests. And this happens not only with food. The humoral body is also continually influenced by its immediate surround, particularly the air and climate. According to Levinus Lemnius, for instance, one's "disposition" is determined by the grossness or subtlety of the spirits the body receives, partly from nourishment and partly from "the condition of the air and state of the region."<sup>10</sup> As Robert Burton puts it, "Such as is the Aire, such be our spirits, and as our spirits, such are our humors."<sup>11</sup> Under continual influence from without, the boundaries between this rather porous body and its environment never stabilize, and the question remains open, as in Browne's image, whether the self is eater or eaten.

Galenic conceptions of health and disease also suggest less rigid distinctions between self and world than modern medical theory. Good health depends on the body's proper humoral balance, which, as Nancy Siraisi explains, is not a normal state but requires "constant monitoring and regulation in health as well as in sickness."<sup>12</sup> The body is not a closed and self-regulating system; bloodletting, cautery, foods, and medicines are all part of an ongoing, normal regimen for correcting the quantity and quality of the humors, which are continually subject to change. Disease is understood as a humoral imbalance, and although this imbalance comes about through external influence, the disease is not seen as a foreign presence within the body, but as a condition of what has become the body itself. As Siraisi notes, in diagnosing and treating, for instance, an upper respiratory infection, patients and doctors "certainly did not think in terms of an underlying invasive entity with specific, determinate, and persisting identity."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the model does not resemble modern germ theory. Nor does it posit an immune system that works by recognizing what does and does not belong to the self.

Renaissance physiology does more to describe and explain how the body is influenced and affected, rather than how it resists the world. Indeed, the language of many treatises emphasizes a lack of resistance—as when Lemnius describes man's body as not only permeable by natural spirits and then inspired and moved with a divine spirit, but also subject to "external spirits recouring into his body and mind"—both good and bad messenger angels that "slyly and secretly glyde into the body of man."<sup>14</sup> And while such discussions often become morally inflected (as in

this passage), the body's vulnerability makes the issue of control quite vexed.

And, of course, it is not only the body but the psyche as well that is influenced from without, for humoral theory posits a profound connection and reciprocity between body and soul. The body can be affected *through* the psyche, and vice versa. The physical link between them is *spirit*, understood as a vapor "generated by the heat of the heart out of the more subtle blood," and used by the soul "for the exercise of the interior as well as the exterior senses."<sup>15</sup> Spirit is the means by which passions occur, and these can affect the humors. As Thomas Wright explains, "there is no Passion very vehement but that it alters extremely some of the four humours of the body."<sup>16</sup> Passions can change one's humoral balance, and conversely, changes in humoral balance (brought about, for instance, by food or air) will produce passions.<sup>17</sup>

As Siraisi notes, there were plenty of objections to this psychological materialism from religious critics, because of the implication that material causes determined the nature of one's soul and moral qualities. Nevertheless, it was the dominant preference of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance medicine to hold that *both* one's physical and mental conditions depend on the individual's overall "complexion" (i.e., temperament, or combination of qualities), which depends on the balance or imbalance of the body's humors.<sup>18</sup> Hence the four main types of persons (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic—each representing the dominance of one of the humors) comprise both physical and mental traits: sanguine types are ruddy and optimistic; phlegmatics heavy, cold, and impassive; the choleric fiery complexioned and rageful; and the melancholic pale, thoughtful, and downcast. In this way, humoral medicine is both psychology and physiology, and sees what we call "personality" as a function of the body. It is thus—not only by analogy, but also directly—a theory of identity. A crucial point here, though, is that that identity or "complexion" can be altered: even though one is born with a dominant humor, this is subject to change through external influence. So the essentialism implicit in humoral theory is also powerfully compromised by its insistence on the body's dependence on context.<sup>19</sup>

Humoral theory can thus suggest a field-based identity: who you are is determined by your physical context as well as by the unstable content of your body, and changes as a result of that involvement with context. By contrast, the model that eventually

supersedes humoral theory—a body whose blood circulates—presents a more self-contained and autonomous condition. This is not to suggest that humoralism allows for *only* this context-embedded version of selfhood. Obviously writers living in a Galenic world can still entertain, say, a Stoic model of selfhood, either resisting or ignoring the physiological paradigm's implications for selfhood. And some humoral treatises seem to aim specifically at increasing their readers' sense of autonomy, offering greater knowledge and control of their own humoral makeup as a means of self-fashioning. But in one way or another, writers are often intensely aware of the elements of humoralism that undermine autonomy, and they develop a multivalent discourse of "humorous" identity traceable in literary uses of the word "humor" itself.

#### SENSES OF "HUMOR"

By the late sixteenth century, the use of "humor" in reference to identity is common, particularly on the stage, and the term also develops new meanings that register some of the tensions and shifts in conceptions of selfhood in the period. The language of humors offers many ways of speaking about what we might call "character" or "personality," though it is far less abstract than those more recent terms. Basically, until the later seventeenth century, this evolving discourse of humorous identity remains faithful to the physiological paradigm of an unstable and context-dependent body, though it is often metaphorized.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the adjective *humorous* develops a rich array of meanings based on the physiological notion that the extreme mutability of humans stems from their shifting humoral balance. Thus *humorous* can signify not only being *changeable*, but also *fanciful*, *moody*, *untrustworthy*, *uncontrollable*, etc. Similarly, the common notion of "feeding" someone's humor (i.e., treating them in a way that is meant to address their mood or temperament) is a figurative development of the idea that one's psycho-physical condition is changed or maintained by continual influence from without.

Most importantly, from the theory that a dominant humor produces a set of typical traits stems a discourse of humors identifying social types on the basis of appearance or visible behavior. By extension, writers in the 1590s also begin using the term with reference beyond the four actual humoral categories, to include "humors" of greed, thrift, revenge, and so on. Thus, from the semiotic nature of the humoral body—its legibility—popular us-

age takes on the broader sense of a temporary mood or characteristic inclination, discernable in behavior. Of course, these are not understood as superficial traits, but represent a deeper, physical reality. Indeed, references to a character's "humor" also frequently capture a sense of the *force* of personal inclination, understood as a kind of physical process—for instance, in a character with a "humor" of jealousy. Such an identity is all the more potent because it is not an abstract interiority but represents the work of the body. With that physical force behind it, a "humor" will not be easily resisted or ignored. This unavoidable quality is what Shakespeare parodies in the figure of Nym in *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with his repeated references to the given "humor" of a situation, thing, or person: be it ever so temporary, there is always something inevitable and unyielding about a "humor" for Nym. His signature line, "and that's the humor of it," means basically, "case closed." In *The Merry Wives*, Nym uses the word in such a dizzying succession of senses that it becomes an all-purpose term for any kind of *legible meaning* about which nothing can be done.

On the other hand, with such increasing reference to readable signs, there also develops in the discourse of humors a tension between the idea of being legible and the possibility of being theatrical. That is, observable traits also become *playable* traits, and it begins to seem that humors can be imitated or put on. This possibility appears to interest playwrights especially, who offer subtle and complex investigations of its philosophical and social implications. In *Henry V*, for instance, while Nym can *read* the "humors" of situations, Henry can *play* them, and he coaches his men at Harfleur to do the same:

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
 As modest stillness and humility;  
 But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
 Then imitate the action of the tiger;  
 Stiffen the sinews, [conjure] up the blood,  
 Disguise fair nature with hard-favor'd rage;  
 Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;  
 . . . . .  
 Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,  
 Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit  
 To his full height.<sup>21</sup>

Part of what is at stake here is the contrast between Henry, who knows how to play this hot and rageful temperament when circumstances demand it, and his former rival Hotspur, who could *only* be choleric. This capacity for behavioral range and control would seem to be at odds with the more determined sense of “humors” represented by either Hotspur or Nym, and thus Shakespeare’s texts capture some of the tensions and contradictions around the idea of humorous identity at this time.<sup>22</sup> And yet, if we see Shakespeare as satirizing the typical humors character and suggesting in Henry the possibility of a more self-determined mode of identity, it’s important to see that the strategy behind it still relies on a humoral sense of the reciprocity of mind and body. For clearly it is not just the *act* that will win a battle, but the physical state that that act produces. Henry’s speech is not meant to give his men a sense of how to fake a condition, but to give them a physical recipe for creating it. This mimetic theory is not foreign to humoral medicine, which credits the same outside-in process of behavioral change.<sup>23</sup> Here, though, the actor learns to remake *himself* by manipulating his *own* “spirit,” which he then, according to Henry’s final charge, should “follow.”<sup>24</sup>

Because of its humoral basis, the acting process that Shakespeare cites here does not necessarily involve the disjunction between inner and outer realms that we often assume today in discussing “theatrical” selfhood. It may grant the actor a high degree of control, but that does not entail our usual dichotomy of public and private selves.<sup>25</sup> In this kind of self-fashioning, the effect is not a hidden, inner self but a *linear* process of transformation—i.e., the self is not split, but changed, both inside and out.<sup>26</sup> The same striking notion of acting-as-becoming is also evident in Ben Jonson, though with a more obviously negative valence. For instance, in a famous passage from “Discoveries,” he takes the ancient *theatrum mundi* idea in a behavioral direction, claiming that “our whole life is like a *Play*: wherein every man, forgetfull of himselfe, is in travaile with expression of another. Nay, wee so insist in imitating others, as wee cannot (when it is necessary) returne to our selves: like Children, that imitate the vices of *Stammerers* so long, till at last they become such; and make the habit to another nature, as it is never forgotten.”<sup>27</sup> In this passage, Jonson suggests a great deal about both acting and selfhood. He compares the influence of social context, which he takes to be inevitable, to the process of acting, which he explains as being “in travaile” with someone else’s “expression.” Perhaps most striking here is the way that Jonson equates playing with

an ultimate lack of autonomy: to act is to forget oneself, and to become involved with otherness in a way that transforms one's "nature." The passage reflects a complex understanding of identity, which is seen as both "habit" and "nature." Recognizing the power of social context to change and shape us, Jonson also laments it.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, he implies an original (forgotten) self prior to social engagement, but then also suggests that that self is nearly impossible to maintain intact, given our apparent need to imitate (and thereby become like) others.

In the next paragraph Jonson claims a few rare exceptions to the self-forgetfulness of our basically theatrical selfhood, which he seems to find so compromising: "For though the most be Players, some must be *Spectators*."<sup>29</sup> Such spectators are "plac'd high on the top of all vertue," where they look down on "the Stage of the world" and judge "the Play of *Fortune*." These "Good men" (Jonson lists Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham), aloof from contamination though condemned as mad by a mad world, seem to retain an independent identity that Jonson claims is exemplary.<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere Jonson explicitly associates the more common, non-autonomous, theatrical self with "humorousness." His second humors play, *Every Man out of His Humour*, offers its own definition of the term: "what soe'er hath fluxure, and humiditie, / As wanting power to containe it selfe, / Is Humour," we're told, and the four humors receive that name "By reason that they flow continually . . . and are not continent."<sup>31</sup> And this principle of fluidity and incontinence is the basis of the true meaning of humorous identity: it is applied "by *Metaphore*" to the human disposition.<sup>32</sup> For Jonson, this is primarily a negative meaning, associated with the "ridiculous" affectations of social climbers, who are satirized for being theatrical—not in our usual sense of a deliberately controlling and persuasive actor, but in a weaker sense of fops putting on identities in order to follow fashion.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically for us (though apparently not for Jonson), the trouble with such theatrically humorous characters is that they are *not enough* in control of themselves—their very affectations are a sign of their incontinence. Their theatricality poses not so much an epistemological problem (of some hidden, inner selfhood) as a social problem of hierarchically unstable self-fashioning types, who are the constant target of the play's social satire.<sup>34</sup> The "Humorist" may seem to be making choices, but he is really being changeable in a way that Jonson suggests reflects a lack of self-determination.<sup>35</sup> And so "such spongie natures, / As licke up every idle vanitie" are what the play is explicitly out to reform.<sup>36</sup>

## DONNE'S DIAGNOSIS

This aspect of the humoral paradigm—the principle of fluidity—is something critics recognize as central to Donne's representations of selfhood, though they fail to connect this principle with the humoral body. Carey's book, for instance, has a whole chapter on "Change," in which he claims that, unlike many of his seventeenth-century contemporaries, Donne saw mutability not as an external force, but as "a part of himself," and recognized that to talk about himself "was to talk about change, and to change as he talked."<sup>37</sup> Carey cites Donne's constant use of images of fluidity to capture the nature of his experience—both physical and spiritual—as "personal flux."<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, at one point he compares Donne's ideas to those of Walter Pater, citing Pater's similar assertions that our physical life as well as "the inward world of thought and feeling" are in perpetual motion, and that our inner life especially is "a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought" that leaves us with only "that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves."<sup>39</sup>

But this comparison of Donne and Pater works only up to a point. For Pater, the fluid individual is also essentially self-contained—radically inaccessible to, and isolated from, others. In the same passage that Carey quotes from, Pater also insists that experience "is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of [our] impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world."<sup>40</sup> Pater's conception of an autonomous, individual mind (with its attendant skepticism about the external world) bears little resemblance to what Donne constantly portrays as an extreme degree of interpenetration of minds, bodies, and souls. The nineteenth-century theory of perception that informs Pater's ideas about "personality" and the relationship between self and world does not figure in Donne's understanding. Rather, the physical and perceptual models that Donne knows and draws on posit real contact between self and world, and mutability for Donne is the result not of our isolation, but of its opposite—of the self's necessary openness to, and dependence on, its surround.

Donne's emphasis on the fluid body figures not just change, but exchange—not just *personal* flux, but *interpersonal* flux.

Change usually takes place in the context of the encounter with another person, or text, or consciousness, and the point is not just the *fluidity* of the self, but how much it is made up of the other, and what that can mean. In poems such as “The Legacy” or the elegy “Change,” a constant entanglement of self and other is evident in the exchange or confusion of emotion, perspective, or body parts that so often takes place as the poem proceeds. In this way, Donne’s focus on the body becomes part of a focus on the *other*—that is, a focus on his connection and subjection to the other. And of course, the humoral body especially captures that model of subjection.

It is not a model, however, that Donne is comfortable with early on. The opening of an early satire, “Away thou fondling motley humourist,” expresses an almost Jonsonian discomfort with the idea of a changeable or humorous identity and a preference for more “constant company.”<sup>41</sup> Donne’s awareness that such humorous mutability suggests a *subjected* selfhood is clear from another early poem in which he explicitly uses the humoral paradigm as a model for the relationship between self and social world, and rejects it as such. In his verse letter to Sir Henry Wotton, “Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls,” Donne tells his friend that “Virtue is barbarous” (line 34) (that is, it lives only outside civilization), and he advises him to avoid the equally ill effects of court, city, and country:

Only in this one thing, be no Galenist: to make  
Courts’ hot ambitions wholesome, do not take  
A dram of country’s dullness; do not add  
Correctives, but as chemics, purge the bad.

(lines 59–62)

Donne’s reference here to “Galenists” and “chemics” invokes the competition between traditional humoral theory and the more recent and controversial Paracelsian medicine, which Donne would likely have known about through his physician stepfather.<sup>42</sup> His contrast between the two models makes it quite clear that what he finds objectionable about the Galenic paradigm is its emphasis on digestion and concoction—that is, on the taking in of external “correctives,” which then alter or become part of oneself. The “chemic,” on the other hand, doesn’t alter the self *per se*, but only removes what doesn’t belong to it. As Thomas Willard explains, the Paracelsian model constituted a new theory of disease. In contrast to humoral theory, “Paracelsus regarded dis-

ease as a parasite and thought there could be as many types of disease as there are parts of the body. He is distinctly modern at this point, in line with current germ theory.<sup>43</sup> This is the underlying theoretical distinction in Donne's analogy: in the Galenic model, external elements not only penetrate but *add themselves* to the patient, whereas the *chemical* or Paracelsian process merely lifts out unwanted elements considered as alien to the self.

Still, if Donne's analogy clearly rejects a humoral model for selfhood on the grounds that it represents penetration and influence, the poem as a whole is otherwise highly ambivalent about the relationship between self and social world. For at the same time, the speaker also wants to allow, and to augment, the capacity to "mingle souls," and to assert a profound connection, even dependence, between himself and his addressee, without whom as an interlocutor he claims that he "could ideate nothing, which could please," and would "wither in one day" (lines 4–5). While Donne struggles here to represent selfhood in terms that assert a measure of autonomy, he also continually admits that contact with, and contamination by, the world are necessary. All venues are bad, he says, "yet our state's such / That though than pitch they stain worse, we must touch" (lines 9–10). Vice cannot be contained in a "flinty wall" (line 35) of virtue, since "Men are sponges, which to pour out, receive" (line 37). Yet, despite this acknowledgment of our "spongie natures," the poem generally encourages and praises in its addressee the appearance of being "free" from the effects of the world—particularly in advising him, like the snail, to "Be then thine own home, and in thyself dwell" (line 47). On the whole, the interest in "mingling" here competes fairly subtly with the conscious rejection of the model of a permeable and humorous self.<sup>44</sup>

In later writings, Donne's attitude toward the humoral paradigm changes, and he relinquishes this already ambivalent attraction to autonomy and embraces the anxieties of interdependence. He does so both in his love poetry and in his religious works, in which the powerful need for connection with God is so often figured physically. For instance, in holy sonnet 19, the speaker uses the humoral body as a metaphor for his spiritual condition, identifying himself in terms of the changeable or "humorous" potential of that body, especially in a state of illness:

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:  
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot

A constant habit; that when I would not  
 I change in vows, and in devotion.  
 As humorous is my contrition  
 As my profane love, and as soon forgot:  
 As riddlingly distempered, cold and hot,  
 As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.  
 I durst not view heaven yesterday; and today  
 In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God:  
 Tomorrow I quake with true fear of his rod.  
 So my devout fits come and go away  
 Like a fantastic ague: save that here  
 Those are my best days, when I shake with fear.

This is one of several poems in which Stanley Fish finds evidence that “Donne is sick and his poetry is sick.”<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Fish is not talking about Donne’s fever metaphor *per se*, but diagnosing the conception of self that it conveys, which for Fish is not a legitimate kind of self at all. He reads this sonnet as a typical attempt on Donne’s part to convince himself and his reader of his own “sincerity,” and he argues that this is “also at bottom the effort to confirm to himself that he is a self, someone who exceeds the theatrical production of signs and shows.”<sup>46</sup> For Fish, instability means inauthenticity: “The problem is succinctly enacted in the first line: if contraries meet in one, then one is not one—an entity that survives the passing of time—but two or many. This would-be-one looks back on its history and sees only a succession of poses—contrition, devotion, fear—no one of which is sufficiently sustained to serve as the center he would like to be able to claim.”<sup>47</sup> But the “humorous” spiritual selfhood Donne describes is not necessarily, as Fish suggests, a duplicitous self. Certainly the speaker himself is complaining about his mutability, but in calling his contrition “humorous” he is not calling it inauthentic. Sincere emotions need not be fixed emotions; rapid change is a sign of instability, but not duplicity. As we saw with Shakespeare and Jonson, to be theatrically “humorous” is not necessarily to become double, nor to control how one changes. Indeed, the problem for the speaker here seems to be precisely his lack of control over his changing behavior.

Fish claims that readers seek and fail to find in Donne’s poems a transcendent self—a consciousness “real, purely present, valiantly o’erstriding the abyss of textuality,” which would offer “a state (of awareness, control, and self-possession) to which they could at least aspire.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, he wants (and thinks we

want) a self to be subjective, stable, autonomous: “A consciousness that can rewrite its own grounds in the twinkling of an eye is not a consciousness at all, but a succession of refigurings no different finally from the refigurings it boasts to have produced in others.”<sup>49</sup> In this view, the interpersonally based identity that Donne portrays is something that “undoes” the speaker, makes the poem “negate itself,” and marks “the dislodgement of the centered self by the fragmentary . . . discourse it presumed to control.”<sup>50</sup>

I have cited Fish’s argument in some detail here because it is representative in many ways of what criticism of Donne often assumes about selfhood. The problem with such an analysis is its simple binary: the self is either centered or decentered. In this sonnet, though, the self is neither, and this is because it is not primarily a subjective self—i.e., not a representation of purely subjective consciousness in which the speaker’s own present-tense experience dominates. Instead, the speaker in Donne’s poem takes a distanced view of himself, from many different, external perspectives. He is the objectified “me” who is vexed by the paradox of a constant inconstancy. He is the former poet of “profane” and inconstant love, whose problem now is that he hasn’t really changed, but is still inconstant both in language (his “vows”) and experience (his “devotion”). He is the “distempered” humoral body whose helplessness is conveyed in a list of the same extremes that defined his libertine body—a series of opposites that ultimately enacts a loss of sense even as it expresses his lack of control over himself. And even when a subjective “I” does seem to emerge in lines 9, 10, and 11, it is still in a list of self-objectifications: how I felt yesterday, how I look to myself today, how I will feel tomorrow. In the end, all of this does combine to portray a subjective state, but it is not one of autonomy or of a controlling consciousness. Its main attribute, in fact, is anxiety—the affect of helplessness. Overall, the poem’s effect is unsettling, and what is most striking is the speaker’s final claim that this condition is valuable—in a sense, that this kind of selfhood is the correct one. Identifying the physical disease with the spiritual cure, he suggests his feverish anxiety and lack of control are right.

To say that the point of this poem is the speaker’s lack of control is to take issue with Scarry’s argument that this kind of physical imagery ultimately makes for a “volitional” and a “noncontingent” body.<sup>51</sup> Scarry finds in Donne’s language an “absorption with contract and consent,” but interprets this as an emphasis on individual will rather than on connection with the other. And although she admits that disease, with which Donne

is so often preoccupied, is by its nature something to which one does not consent, she claims that this explains Donne's "horror" of it.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, I suggest that in focusing on disease, Donne often (as we have just seen) embraces it as an important metaphor for selfhood. And the disease model produces not a non-contingent body, but a contingent, necessarily negotiating self. In Scarry's important argument about Donne's connection of language and the body, one question she does not address is *whose* language is being "carried" into *whose* body. Eliding the specifics of the interpersonal situations Donne represents allows her to arrive at the idea that Donne makes the body independent enough to be "volitional." But very often, Donne's speaker is (as per Jonson) "in travaile with expression of another."<sup>53</sup> In "O to vex me," for instance, the underlying constant reference is to God's judgment, and that uncontrollable perspective is what Donne says *should* control the speaker's body and soul.

What is difficult to capture here is the way that in his representations of self, Donne is *both* talking about self and talking about context—in a sense, he is talking about self *as* context. We have little in the way of theoretical language with which to address that kind of interpenetration of self and world, and critical discussions are often content with conceptions of a more individual self that keep suggesting that agency is, or should be, a necessary function of selfhood. One theoretical outlook that does offer useful terms for this discussion, however, is Mikhail Bakhtin's, particularly in his work on Rabelais and grotesque realism. As Gail Kern Paster points out, Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque body has a lot in common with the humoral body: both constitute "a plenitude, full of activities apart from mind through which it [the body] expresses its unity with and sense of belonging to the natural world."<sup>54</sup> And I would add that in Bakhtin's view, the grotesque also represents the body as belonging to a larger *social* whole. In this respect, I think it offers to illuminate some of what is at stake in Donne's representations of the body.<sup>55</sup>

#### GROTESQUE REMEDIES: DONNE'S LANGUAGE OF DIGESTION

As Bakhtin describes it, the grotesque body is in constant flux and is open to, and continuous with, the world around it: "Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body . . . is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, trans-

gresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world."<sup>56</sup> The essential principle of grotesque realism for Bakhtin is degradation: in its emphasis on the material body, it turns its subject into flesh and brings the spiritual and the abstract down to the material bodily level, down toward the fruitful earth and the womb.<sup>57</sup> And in this way its degradation is at the same time a regeneration, part of "the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development."<sup>58</sup> Ongoing in time, and in space "blended with the world,"<sup>59</sup> this body is part of a wider whole because it is integrated with its social context.

In the history that Bakhtin charts of grotesque representations of the body, that social integration gets lost by the eighteenth century. In medieval and Renaissance cultures, the grotesque belongs to festive, carnival experience; but gradually, it takes on an entirely different, more gothic, character. In Romanticism, it becomes "the expression of a subjective, individualistic world outlook very different from the carnival folk concept of previous ages."<sup>60</sup> The Romantic grotesque acquires "a private 'chamber' character" and becomes "as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation."<sup>61</sup> And carnival laughter, which Bakhtin says "is also directed at those who laugh," becomes, by the eighteenth century, the negative laughter of satire, in which the satirist separates himself from the object of his laughter, and that laughter "becomes a private reaction."<sup>62</sup>

In Bakhtin's historical scenario, most Renaissance literature falls midway along the trajectory from the public, festive body of medieval culture to the "individualized" and private Romantic body. This transitional status is the source of what he calls "the peculiar drama" of the body in Renaissance literature, whereby "however divided, atomized, individualized were the 'private' bodies" of the Renaissance, they "could not be considered for themselves; they represented a material bodily whole and therefore transgressed the limits of their isolation."<sup>63</sup> This very general statement gains support from an understanding of the basic humoral conception of the body in the period. Bakhtin's discussion of the pre-modern grotesque body places it almost exclusively within "folk culture," but the body he describes has roots in the ancient and pervasive tradition of humoral medicine. Thus, representations such as Donne's that draw on that tradition share many of the principles of Bakhtin's festive carnival body.

Donne's physical imagery is clearly grotesque rather than what Bakhtin calls "classic."<sup>64</sup> As Carey notes, readers have often been disappointed by the way that, unlike much Renaissance poetry, Donne's is not about beauty, but about sensation. It is often not a very visual imagery, but tactile and experiential, particularly in the way it seeks to draw us into the physical experience of what it describes—as Carey puts it, "to haul our bodies into [its] descriptive activities."<sup>65</sup> In his frequent recourse to images of anatomy, Donne's tendency is to open the body up, to make it available and not private. Everywhere he portrays the body in extremity (particularly in his own or his lovers' fevers)—that is, the body as it has been penetrated and altered from without. His physical imagery is often degrading in Bakhtin's regenerative sense: in sermons and in sonnets such as the powerful "Batter my heart, three-personed God," images of physical penetration and humiliation shatter the body in the interest of renewal or salvation. In the love poems, nakedness, promiscuity, and all manner of interpersonal exchanges produce interpenetrated or, in Donne's word, "interinanimated" selves ("The Ecstasy," line 42). In its own enlivening way, then, Donne's physical imagery moves grotesque realism into the realms of both love poetry and Christian doctrine.

This grotesque realism most prominently shapes Donne's representation of selfhood in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, and severall steps in my Sicknes*, published in 1624. Here, Donne takes the stages in his own recent near-fatal illness and explores their psychological and spiritual analogues. For instance, his physicians' talk of "Criticall dayes" prompts his discourse on spiritually "Criticall dayes."<sup>66</sup> The work has a repetitive form, each chapter divided—or, in the language of the title page, "digested"—into a Meditation, an Expostulation, and a Prayer. That language is no accident: "digestion" is a crucial metaphor for this text, which not only recounts in detail his body's daily condition and its (humoral) medical treatment, but in its repetitive structure—Meditation, Expostulation, Prayer—also keeps reenacting a kind of digestive process. The figure of digestion, which Donne had resisted in his early verse letter to Wotton, has become one of his favorite metaphors,<sup>67</sup> and now allows him to suggest a model of profound self-insufficiency which he also extends beyond the spiritual realm to include social and political functioning.

Each chapter or "devotion" tends to follow a basic pattern. In the Meditations, Donne presents himself (or man) in a singular, isolated state, and the sense of aloneness and self-containment

leaves him abject and disconnected. Then in the Expostulations, he breaks that isolation, engaging in what looks on the page like a dialogized process of complaint, forcing an interaction by stuffing his text with God's, speaking its language, constantly quoting biblical figures, and moving through this material to a new position informed by what he now understands as God's viewpoint. Finally, the Prayers represent the new, corrected condition, a state of calm and relaxation that claims a oneness with the wider context of divine will. The whole process, repeated over and over, resembles one of digestion—of taking something in, grappling with it till it becomes part of oneself and till one's "disposition" is changed by it. Even more, it resembles a purge in the humoral sense—an active engagement of inner space with an external force that rights it. The Expostulations are where most of the biblical citations take place, and while there can also be biblical text in the Meditations and Prayers, it tends to sit quieter there, to involve less of a violent struggle. The Prayers tend each time to reassert a kind of wholeness that is neither fixed nor independent, but intensely aware of its contingency on the other (i.e., God).

The idea of a purge not only informs the text in this structural way, but is also a remedy explicitly invoked throughout the *Devotions*. God is identified in the last chapter as the "Physitian" and Christ as the "Physicke" (p. 142). At one point, when Donne's physicians apply live, sliced-open pigeons to his feet in order to draw the vapors away from his head, Donne proposes this as a type of Christ, sent down to draw off the world's evil. At another point he claims that his heart is "alive" because of "the powerfull working of thy piercing Spirit" through yet another form of purgation, "Wormewood" (a medicine for expelling worms from the intestines) (p. 65). Donne uses the ongoing analogy between his physical and spiritual conditions to portray himself as continually open to influences, both good and bad: his heart is "prepared" by and for God, but it is also continually "subject to the invasion of malignant and pestilent vapours" (p. 65). He sounds rather like Lemnius at one point, talking about how the serpent enters at our orifices and makes us sin in secret, even from ourselves, which is, Donne says, the same as *being* a devil to ourselves (p. 57)—again, the paradigm being that what is outside has a powerful potential to *become* self. And Donne takes every opportunity to gloss biblical texts with what is his basic model of self-insufficiency, figured throughout in the inability of the patient to "make him selfe wel" (p. 18). Man is impotent alone, for

God has "suffred us to destroy ourselves, and [has] not given us the power of reparation in ourselves" (p. 72). On its own, the soul is not a healthy system, but corrupt and self-toxic like the body, and health is made possible only by interventions from without (p. 135). What seems to be most important to Donne in all of this is not just the doctrine of his own innate sinfulness, but the way that it requires an ongoing connection with God, and so he almost seems to welcome the possible relapse of that sinfulness because it requires the continued connection. As a result of the "purging" experience of the illness itself, Donne is finally able to represent his relationship with God as one of "participation" and "possession": "thy *Correction* hath brought mee to such a *participation of thy selfe* (*thy selfe, O my God, cannot bee parted*) to such an *intire possession* of thee, as that I durst deliver my selfe over to thee this *minute*" (pp. 146–7).

And God is not the only other in the *Devotions* with whom Donne insists on a fundamental connection. The text is also full of passages asserting the necessity of other human beings in the makeup of self. From the famous "no man is an island" passage in the seventeenth Meditation, where he claims that "any man's *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*" (p. 98), to passages that call solitude "the greatest misery" (p. 22) and even make it responsible for the Fall,<sup>68</sup> this is an idea the text refuses to lose sight of. The image of the microcosm, with its suggestion of an isolated state, occurs throughout the *Devotions*, and always with a negative valence. For Donne, it is "a *disease of the mind*" (p. 24, line 11) to choose to be alone—he even argues against religious solitude, declaring that it is wrong to think that "the way to the *Communion of Saints*, should be by such a *solitude*, as excludes all doing of good here" (p. 24). Separation and individuation make no sense to Donne as principles on which to act: "There is no *Phenix*," he says, "nothing singular, nothing alone" (p. 23).

So much for autonomy. Yet many critics still find in Donne an "inescapable" self-absorption or egotism.<sup>69</sup> David Hirsch, for instance, asserts that the *Devotions* as well as the sermons display an "egocentric desire for a permanence of self."<sup>70</sup> Thus he finds that "throughout Donne's lifetime . . . his conception of self is deeply rooted in the integrity of his personal body."<sup>71</sup> Beside the fact that this argument *ad hominem* offers to analyze Donne rather than his imagery (treating him as a patient instead of crediting him with a conscious philosophical position), it also fails to explain why Donne's imagery keeps pulling the body apart. Hirsch

claims that in his many writings on the “revolutions of dust” Donne is “horrified at the thought that the material remains of one’s body can be so easily scattered and confounded with particles of that which it is not.”<sup>72</sup> But the point of Donne’s imagery is not necessarily to express horror. Indeed, I would suggest that he embraces this shattering and scattering of self in constantly emphasizing it—showing not so much a fear of it, and certainly not a will to deny it, but rather an insistence on its implications about our utter lack of control over any dimension of our physical or spiritual selves. So, far from representing his own “egotism,” such imagery aims at breaking through what he suggests is only an illusion of self-sufficiency—an illusion that would be even stronger for Donne’s modern readers than for his contemporaries.

This tendency to misread as a desire for autonomy what is really quite the opposite—an insistence on dependence and a longing for connection—may occur because of the way Donne’s language can often *seem* to reflect our own assumptions about selfhood, unless we are careful to look for the difference. Perhaps the best example of this problem occurs in a sermon in which Donne’s constant use of the words “ego” and “I” might at first glance seem to support the idea of his insistence on *self*. But interestingly, what he is really harping on is an ideal union of *body and soul*: “and yet, *Ego*, I, I the same body, and the same soul, shall be recompact again, and be identically, numerically, individually the same man . . . I shall be all there, my body, and my soul, and all my body, and all my soul . . . I cannot say, you cannot say so perfectly, so entirely now, as at the Resurrection, *Ego*, I am here; I, body and soul.”<sup>73</sup> Clearly “ego” means not just “I” for Donne, but “I am *here*”—a necessarily physical idea that integrates body and soul. Part of what he stresses here is a lack of *present* coherence, which can only be fully remedied at the Resurrection.<sup>74</sup> And so the climax of the sermon—where he again explicitly invokes humoral physiology—speaks of a fusion with *other* flesh: “As my meat is assimilated to my flesh, and made one flesh with it; as my soul is assimilated to my God, and *made partaker of the divine nature*, and *Idem Spiritus*, the same Spirit with it; so, there my flesh shall be assimilated to the flesh of my Saviour, and made the same flesh with him too.”<sup>75</sup> Donne is talking about self here, but it is a radically different kind of self than critics often assume—entailing cohesion and connection with a wider whole, rather than individual autonomy. This self is both eating and eaten, and it doesn’t really matter which. Donne is not fearful of losing his *own* body—only of bodilessness *per se*. In

other words, it is an *abstract* (i.e., purely inner) self that Donne abhors, because that means (as in Pater's conception) the loss of connection.

But if we recognize that Donne's model for selfhood is one of intense vulnerability, contingency, even ultimate dissipation, we must also be clear that this is not a negative model for him—not a view of inevitable disaster. He is not deconstructing the self. Rather, he takes what seems to be catastrophic (for instance, his own illness) and calls it a solution. It is hard to say which comes first for Donne—whether the deep need for connection with the other makes him thrive on the sense of his own incompleteness, or whether it's the other way around. But either way, Donne is committed to a radically interpersonal selfhood—a sense that the root or cause or locus of one's *self* lies in *others*. It's the intense responsiveness of selfhood to its contexts—spiritual, sexual, social, political—that Donne registers in his exquisitely physical imagery. And his best expression of it is the humoral patient—both distempered and cured by the process of penetration.

#### NOTES

I am indebted to Gail Kern Paster and the members of the Folger Institute seminar on humoral theory for helpful discussions of an early version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> John Donne, *The Sermons*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1953–62), 9:223, 2:84, 9:124, 1:192, 4:358.

<sup>2</sup> John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind, and Art* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 82, 265. See also Elaine Scarry, "Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke,'" in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Scarry (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 70–105; David A. Hedrich Hirsch, "Donne's Atomies and Anatomies: Deconstructed Bodies and the Resurrection of Atomic Theory," *SEL* 31, 1 (Winter 1991): 69–94; Stanley Fish, "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 223–52. Arguments about Donne's self-absorption prior to Carey are well summarized by Ilona Bell, "The Role of the Lady in Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*," *SEL* 23, 1 (Winter 1983): 113–29.

<sup>3</sup> Carey, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Scarry, pp. 81, 84, 93. For another recent argument about Donne's attribution of substantiality to language, see Judith H. Anderson's *Words that Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance English* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996). Anderson also finds in Donne a "bid to abolish the borders of *verba* and *res* and to assert ultimate control over his own meaning," (p. 215) (although she emphasizes as well the simultaneous possibility of an "alternative reading" [p. 227]).

<sup>5</sup> Such readings share an increasingly common view of Donne's "individualism" and associate him with what has traditionally been seen as the Renaissance movement toward a more inward and autonomous selfhood. For another recent version of such arguments, see Richard Strier's "Radical Donne: 'Satire III,'" *ELH* 60, 2 (Summer 1993): 283–322. But for a different interpretation of Donne's self-presentation in the context of his politics see Annabel Patterson, "All Donne," in *Soliciting Interpretation*, pp. 37–67; and "John Donne, Kingsman?" in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991) pp. 251–72. Patterson argues, in contrast to Carey, that Donne is not "a monster of ambition," but rather "a mass of contradictions" ("All Donne," p. 42), and that, in his tenuous political position, he resorted to a strategy of a "formally divided self" ("John Donne, Kingsman?" p. 265).

<sup>6</sup> The ancient physiology of the four humors (also known as "Galenism") dominated medical theory and practice through the Renaissance and only started to give way to the emerging theories of modern medicine toward the end of the seventeenth century. It was challenged to some extent by Paracelsian medicine, which, to Donne's mind at least, presented a somewhat different model for selfhood, as I discuss below. But Galenic theory prevailed, and, in fact, many of its practices persisted up through the nineteenth century. See Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990); and Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> This essay makes some general claims about the ways in which the context of humoral medicine helped shape conceptions of selfhood in the Renaissance, but my argument here is not that ideas of selfhood are wholly or uniformly determined by that context. What interests me are the ways Donne and other writers interpret the humoral paradigms, drawing on that medical context in order to represent and critique different models of selfhood.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, ed. Jean-Jacques Denonain (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1953), p. 57, lines 1300–5.

<sup>9</sup> The humors are four specific body fluids with different combinations of the four primary qualities, phlegm being cold and moist, melancholy cold and dry, blood hot and moist, and cholera hot and dry. On humoral theory see Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. and ed. Margaret Tallmadge May, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968); and *Galen on the Passions and Errors of the Soul*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, ed. Walther Riese (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1963); and Aristotle, "Parts of Animals" and "On the Soul," in *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 1:994–1086, 641–92.

<sup>10</sup> Levinus Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton (London: Thomas Marsh, 1576), p. 13. Celestial influences too "were often considered responsible for variations in the health or sickness of the body, either directly or via changes they brought about in the air" (Siraisi, p. 123).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, Rhonda L. Blair, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1:1.2.2.5, pp. 233–4.

<sup>12</sup> Siraisi, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Lemnius, p. 22. Similarly, Burton, in a long "Digression of Spirits," describes how malignant spirits can work "both upon body and mind" (1:1.2.1.2, pp. 192–3). Citing numerous authorities, he writes of "unclean spirits" that are said to become "mixed with our melancholy humours," and to "go in and out of our bodies, as bees do in a hive" (1:1.2.1.2, p. 194).

<sup>15</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, trans. and ed. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), p. 111. "Spirits" are traditionally divided hierarchically into natural, vital, and animal, corresponding to the vegetal, sensible, and rational soul, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (1604), ed. William Webster Newbold (rprt. NY: Garland, 1986), book 1, chap. 1, p. 91. For example, the passion of pleasure "bringeth health, because the purer Spirits retire unto the heart (and they help marvelously the digestion of blood) so that thereby the heart engendereth great abundance and most purified spirits, which after being dispersed through the body cause a good concoction to be made in all parts, helping them to expel the superfluities . . . From good concoction, expulsion of superfluities, and abundance of spirits proceedeth a good colour, a clear countenance, and an universal health of body" (book 2, chap. 3, p. 135).

<sup>17</sup> On the reciprocity of the passions and humors see Wright, book 2, chap. 3, pp. 135–9. It is worth noting that, as a result of this reciprocity, treatment would often involve addressing the patient's mood as well as intake of air and sustenance. As Timothy Bright explains in his *Treatise of Melancholie* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1586), one's "diet" also consists of one's activities (because these affect the body's condition) as well as one's "house, habitation, and apparel" (pp. 242–3, see also chaps. 38 and 39).

<sup>18</sup> Siraisi, p. 102

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that gender also plays a crucial role in determining the makeup of the humoral body. The female body is generally understood as innately colder and moister than the male, from which most theorists argue for women's natural and social inferiority in relation to men. These differences are not central to my arguments in this paper, though one might say that the humoral body's basic vulnerability to the external world is increased in the female body. As Ian Maclean writes, Renaissance physiologists can see men and women on a continuum: "all mankind is in a process of continual change linked to age and health; but in this process woman changes more, and more often, and within a shorter space of time" (*The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980], p. 46). Yet women are also, of course, more limited in their range of physical and psychological types.

<sup>20</sup> The use of "humor" seems to shift toward the end of the seventeenth century from its concrete reference to a psycho-physical condition to an abstract reference to an individual's mood or inner personality—something more purely mental or characterological. The reason for this change would seem to have to do not just with the decline of humoral theory toward the end of the seventeenth century, but also with the development in the aftermath of the English Revolution of a newly abstract and interiorized conception of self.

<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry V*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2d edn., ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 974–1021, III.i.3–17.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent discussion of humoralism in this play, see Robert L. Reid, “Humoral Psychology in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*,” *CompD* 30, 4 (Winter 1996–97): 471–502. Reid suggests that Hal’s ability to be “of all humors” reflects his basically sanguine complexion. But he also argues at one point that “Hal’s perpetual contrivances suggest Shakespeare’s faith (at this midpoint of his career) in the subservience of humors and spirits to the rational soul”—an indication that for Shakespeare “kingship is self-fashioning more than royal blood, *tour de force* acting more than true golden temper” (p. 492).

<sup>23</sup> See note 17 above.

<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare, III.i.33.

<sup>25</sup> Many critical analyses of Renaissance selfhood have concentrated on the dichotomy between public and private selves, finding the private or inward self to be a key development in early modern culture. Jean-Christophe Agnew, for instance, argues that English Renaissance culture was developing “a model of the self as a placeless and Protean entity—a liminal being always on the verge of becoming something or someone else” (*Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986], pp. 94–5). Yet he ends up seeing this not as a fundamentally social selfhood but as “a new concept of privacy . . . centered within the self” (p. 97). Similarly, Michael Macrone posits a newly emergent ontology in the Renaissance in which “the ‘private’ self” is “invested with control over its own boundaries” (“The Theatrical Self in Renaissance England,” *QPar* 3, 1 [Spring 1989]: 72–102, 91). In contrast, I am arguing here that the ontology associated with a “humorous” theatricality does not necessarily open a gap between inner and outer states of being. Thus we may be too quick to assume that the theatrical self entails either privacy or control.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed discussion of the humoral basis of Renaissance acting, see Joseph R. Roach, “Changeling Proteus: Rhetoric and the Passions in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1985), pp. 23–57. Roach explains that “the rhetorical theory on which seventeenth-century discussions of acting were based rested not on a foundation of dramaturgy, but on an understanding of how the passions operate on the human body, specifically on the body of one who is actively transforming himself, ‘fashion[ing] all his active spirits,’ into some shape he has imagined” (p. 30; Roach is quoting from Thomas Heywood’s *Apology for Actors* [1612]). Roach also claims that in Renaissance theory, physical transformation via spirit extends beyond the individual actor and includes the spectators: “It was widely believed that the spirits, agitated by the passions of the imager, generate a wave of physical force, rolling through the aether, powerful enough to influence the spirits of others at a distance” (p. 45). Thus the actor’s passions can transform not only his own body internally, but also “the physical space around him” and “the bodies of the spectators who shared that space with him” (p. 27).

<sup>27</sup> Ben Jonson, “*Timber: or, Discoveries*,” in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 8:561–649; 8:597, lines 1093–9.

<sup>28</sup> Roach observes that the Renaissance actor's protean powers were not always seen as positive, with more than one physician commenting on "the perils of habitual self-transformation" and noting an "unsettling resemblance between inspiration and disease" (p. 50).

<sup>29</sup> Jonson, "*Discoveries*," 8:597, line 1109.

<sup>30</sup> Jonson, "*Discoveries*," 8:597, lines 1100–8.

<sup>31</sup> Jonson, "*Every Man out of His Humour*," in *Ben Jonson*, 3:405–604, Induction, lines 96–8, 100–1.

<sup>32</sup> Jonson, "*Every Man out of His Humour*," Induction, line 103.

<sup>33</sup> Jonson, "*Every Man out of His Humour*," Induction, line 114.

<sup>34</sup> In Jonson's humors plays, both the legibility and the theatricality of "humors" become the targets of his satire. In *Every Man in His Humour*, he pokes fun at a variety of readable social types largely for that quality of readability—that is, for their vulnerability to Brainworm, the servant who understands all their "humors" (gets inside their heads, as it were) and manipulates them all brilliantly. But in *Every Man out of His Humour*, Jonson's satire directs itself at "humors" as a mode of self-fashioning, and here his concern is expressly with the developing conventions of the popular discourse of humors. Both plays tell us a great deal about the kinds of problems that humoralism presents for changing modes of identity in early modern England.

<sup>35</sup> Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humour*, Induction, line 214. From another angle, we can also say that such fops are not changeable enough for Jonson—that they lack the brilliance and at least temporary mastery of characters such as Volpone or Mosca, with whom, as Thomas Greene has noted, Jonson often seems to be in admiring sympathy, though he can also punish them severely in the end (Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," *SEL* 10, 2 [Spring 1970]: 325–48, 336–7).

<sup>36</sup> Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humour*, Induction, lines 145–6. On one level, this play can look as though it rejects the humoral paradigm as a model for selfhood, in favor of a more stoic, impermeable identity. Yet the engine of the play's reform does turn out to be a humoral process—one that ultimately symbolizes a fundamentally social model of selfhood. The play itself is a "phisicke of the mind" (Induction, line 132), and the role of its central character, Macilente, is to bring the other characters "out of their humours" (III.viii.95–6). Administered as a kind of "humor" himself, Macilente is the agent who restores balance to the social body by adding himself to it and causing both it and himself to change. Thus the language of humoralism informs the corrective process of the play as well as its targets. Ultimately, as in the passage from *Discoveries*, Jonson both acknowledges the destabilizing pressure of the social context and condemns it—here, with an anti-"humorist" rhetoric.

<sup>37</sup> Carey, p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Carey, p. 181.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Carey, p. 165.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance in Walter Pater: Three Major Texts* (New York and London: New York Univ. Press, 1986), p. 218.

<sup>41</sup> John Donne, "Satire I," in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), pp. 155–7, lines 1, 11. All subsequent citations will be from this edition and will appear within the text by work and

line number. It should be noted that in a typically un-Jonsonian fashion, Donne's speaker later acknowledges his own complicity in what he satirizes, pointing out that he himself is inconstant in changing his mind and joining the "humourist" in the street (lines 65–7).

<sup>42</sup> See Thomas Willard, "Donne's Anatomy Lesson: Vesalian or Paracelsian?" *JDJ* 3, 1 (Winter 1984): 35–61. As Willard notes, Donne's stepfather, John Syminges, "belonged to the Royal College of Physicians at the time when Paracelsian ideas were making their first inroads" (p. 43).

<sup>43</sup> Willard, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> My reading of Donne's underlying ambivalence about selfhood in this early verse letter is consistent with that of David Aers and Gunther Kress, who interpret it in relation to Donne's status as an "alienated intellectual" at this point in his life. See their "'Darke texts need notes': Versions of Self in Donne's Verse Epistles," in *Critical Essays on John Donne*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994), pp. 102–22.

<sup>45</sup> Fish, p. 223.

<sup>46</sup> Fish, p. 247.

<sup>47</sup> Fish, p. 248.

<sup>48</sup> Fish, p. 245.

<sup>49</sup> Fish, p. 232.

<sup>50</sup> Fish, pp. 234, 231.

<sup>51</sup> Scarry, p. 93.

<sup>52</sup> Scarry, p. 95.

<sup>53</sup> Jonson, "Discoveries," 8:597, line 1094.

<sup>54</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Although it may seem odd to align a socialist theorist with a royalist poet, the two writers' politics share a deep concern for the necessary embeddedness of the person in the social whole. And as Paster argues, an understanding of humoralism offers a "critique and correction" of Mikhail Bakhtin's tendency to associate the grotesque body only with the lower or working classes, since in the medieval culture he analyzes, all classes would understand the body in such open and, for us, transgressive terms (pp. 14–5).

<sup>56</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), p. 26.

<sup>57</sup> Bakhtin, pp. 19–21.

<sup>58</sup> Bakhtin, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Bakhtin, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Bakhtin, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Bakhtin, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Bakhtin, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Bakhtin, p. 30. María J. Pando Canteli argues that the only grotesque bodies in Donne's work are female. While parts of her argument about Donne's representations of women are convincing, her dismissal of Donne's representations of the male body as "tragic" rather than "grotesque" is less so, especially if it is Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque that we have in mind ("One like none, and lik'd of none": John Donne, Francisco de Quevedo, and the Grotesque Representation of the Female Body," *JDJ* 12, 1–2 [1993]: 1–15, 1).

<sup>65</sup> Carey, p. 142.

<sup>66</sup> Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. John Sparrow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923) pp. 78, 82. All subsequent citations will be from this edition and will appear within the text by page number.

<sup>67</sup> Carey also notes "Donne's extraordinarily persistent references to *digestion*, which of all bodily operations seems to have fascinated him the most" (p. 254). For instance, in a sermon predating the *Devotions*, Donne notes that "good digestion brings alwaies assimilation, certainly, if I come to a true meditation upon Christ, I come to a conformity with Christ" (*Sermons*, 2:212).

<sup>68</sup> In the twenty-first Meditation, Donne considers the idea that man might not have fallen had he been left alone in the Garden, and rejects it: "God saw that Man needed a *Helper*, if hee should bee well." In fact, he finds, it was Eve's isolation that left her vulnerable to the Devil: "When *God*, and wee were *alone*, in *Adam*, that was not enough; when the *Devill* and wee were *alone*, in *Eve*, it was enough. O what a *Giant* is *Man*, when he fights against himselfe, and what a *Dwarfe* when he *needs*, or *exercises* his owne assistance for himselfe" (*Devotions*, p. 126). The lack of gender distinction by Donne here is worth noting.

<sup>69</sup> Carey, p. 265; also pp. 80–6.

<sup>70</sup> Hirsch, p. 88.

<sup>71</sup> Hirsch, p. 80.

<sup>72</sup> Hirsch, p. 83. Raymond-Jean Frontain also sees Donne as habitually trying to integrate and unify a threateningly fragmented self and world ("Introduction: 'Make all this All': The Religious Operations of John Donne's Imagination," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi [Conway AR: UCA Press, 1995], pp. 1–27, 2, 8).

<sup>73</sup> *Sermons*, 3:109–10. It should be noted that Donne uses "individually" here in its now obsolete, but then only sense of "indivisibly"—the modern sense of "singly" or "distinctly" being a later coinage (OED).

<sup>74</sup> Coherence for Donne is not an individual but a relational condition—as when he laments in "An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary" that

'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;  
 All just supply, and all relation:  
 Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,  
 For every man alone thinks he hath got  
 To be a phoenix, and that there can be  
 None of that kind, of which he is, but he.

(lines 213–8)

This is the same type that Donne (like Jonson) satirizes as "humorous"—the point here being that this pompously "singular" stance refuses to recognize its own subjection to social context.

<sup>75</sup> *Sermons*, 3:112–3.