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# **Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) English**



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## Abstract

*Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* is a study of the imaginative handling of suffering in Renaissance England literature. Beginning with the Reformed Protestant hermeneutics detailing the redemptive qualities of pain with John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in 1570, the thesis goes on to trace how the poetry and drama of the ensuing century participate in expanding the availability of meanings for pain, culminating with a consideration of the critique of assigning any redemptive values to the pain of John Milton's titular protagonist of his closet drama, *Samson Agonistes*, in 1671. *Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* explores how shifting ideas of the nature of imagination in early modern culture come to be intertwined with the malleable explanations for pain. The significance of this bond between suffering and language as it emerges in early modern England will be illustrated in studies ranging from the catalogue of martyrs' suffering in John Foxe's writings in the 1570s to the poetry of John Milton in the 1670s. The imaginary connection between suffering and the natural world, for instance, informs the action of Christopher Marlowe's plays and Margaret Cavendish's poetry, while the self-destructive capabilities of imagination itself reveal itself in John Donne's meditations. This project engages with the history and philosophy of the imagination and associates the shifting theories with the idiosyncratic representations of suffering in the literary works of the early modern period.

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## INTRODUCTION

Yet though my penne can never half express,  
The hideous torments of my heavy heart,  
Let me set down some touch of my distress,  
That some poor soul may help to bear a part.<sup>1</sup>

After admitting that it is impossible for him to even ‘half express’ his ‘hideous torments’, Nicholas Breton’s undeterred speaker (in the lines quoted above) translates his ‘distress’ into poetry with the satisfaction that, perhaps, at some unspecified future, a ‘poor soul may help to bear a part.’ In this way, Breton distils suffering that is impossible to even ‘half express’ by way of a poetic relay circuit wherein the reader must imaginatively ‘bear a part’, that is, find a meaning for the speaker’s suffering. Paradoxically, self-division – between the sufferer and their ability to express their pain – is the central prerequisite for interpersonal connectivity. As the title of this thesis suggests, the subject of this study is to explore a recurring sentiment in early modern English literature: namely, suffering for some English dramatists and poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is an aesthetic boon that furnishes thinking of and through the possibilities of human imagination.

Before the relationship between suffering and imagination is explored, it is necessary to explain what is meant by these two terms. On the surface, ‘imagination’ and ‘suffering’ appear to be such perennial features of the human experience that neither one warrants an explanation. More than just an instinctive bodily reaction towards pain, suffering connotes the necessity of seeking an intellectual interpretation of the pain. Indeed, pain and suffering are often interchangeable terms. As Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen argues, suffering is not to be thought of as a mere ‘add-on’ to pain that can be easily separated, but rather it is an ‘integral element

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Breton, *Breton’s Bowre of Delights* (London, 1591; S.T.C. 3694.7), p. 5.

of the experience of pain.’<sup>2</sup> As the writers examined in this thesis are not victims per se, the suffering examined is imaginary. It is this act of imagining suffering that forms an undercurrent throughout this project. Imagination, like suffering, deceives through its ubiquitous familiarity. The image-making faculty of the mind, the ability to cogitate, and, most notably for the current project, the ability to craft literature all hail from the imagination.

Universal, and, at the same time, infinitely variable down to the level of an individual’s perpetual thoughts and feelings throughout their lives, suffering and imagination border on the inexplicable. The infinite variations and possibilities of both suffering and imagination within different cultures and individuals throughout their daily lives suggest that offering a linguistic encapsulation of these universal phenomena of the human experience is hopelessly inadequate to the task. Nevertheless, it is precisely this failure of language to capture suffering and imagination that the poetry and drama of the English Renaissance successfully dramatises.<sup>3</sup> As with Breton’s plea to the reader to help him overcome his inarticulateness, the writers explored in the following chapters share an interest in intertwining suffering and imagination to reap the painful but productive affordances of such a combination. Suffering is often conceived as a passive transaction to the extent it is ‘world destroying’, to borrow Elaine Scarry’s famous description of torture in oppressive twentieth-century regimes.<sup>4</sup> Staking its claim on conjoining suffering and imagination, this thesis shows how English writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were at pains to illustrate the *poiesis* behind suffering *and* the imagination itself. Indeed, the subject *in extremis* searching desperately for the meaning of

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> This idea that the inchoate nature of a phenomenon is its strength rather than a weakness (for literary purposes) is indebted to Abraham Stoll’s examination of the conscience in early modern literature. See Stoll, *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. pp. 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 29.



their suffering is analogous to the crises in experience that typified the fallout of the English Reformation in the sixteenth century.

‘The Reformation smashed more than idols,’ and this is true as far as interpreting Christ’s suffering was an ‘idol’ to follow when faced with affliction.<sup>5</sup> It would be far too neat a trajectory, however, to presuppose that the decline of religious models of suffering was at the behest of a swerve towards medical – that is, observable – methods of understanding and treating bodily injuries. The period under examination, 1570-1671, was chosen not just for the epoch-shifting events of great suffering in England – eruptions of plague, internecine religious struggles, national civil war, and the execution of the King – but also for the points of contact between suffering and the imagination. What the shifting (and often overlapping) philosophical, medical, and theological discourses of the imagination adds up to is that the need for each writer of this study to stake their unique impression of suffering within their work is intimately tied to their ability to imbibe and critique pervading concepts regarding the imaginative faculties. To counter Scarry’s ‘world destroying’ thesis, English writers in what is often retroactively imagined to be the Golden Age of English letters, encounter suffering as a ‘blank chalkboard [which] invites scribbling’ at the precise moment when the chalkboard, so to speak, as well as countless nodes of experience, were being whitewashed by the forces of the English Reformation.<sup>6</sup> As Joseph Campana describes it, ‘the consequences of religious dissent altered fundamentally not only devotional practices and identities but also the way experiences of pleasure, *pain*, and vulnerability were construed and represented.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Campana, ‘Pain’, *John Donne in Context*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 196-203, p. 198. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> The metaphor of pain as a blank chalkboard is taken from Melanie Thernstrom, *The Pain Chronicles* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 5.

Created by God in His image allegedly; ‘in apprehension how like a God,’ according to Hamlet; humans are, despite all these pretensions, subject to the shared vulnerability wherein ‘the slightest pinprick... is sufficient to deprive us of the pleasure of being monarch of the world’.<sup>8</sup> Beginning with the Reformed Protestant hermeneutics detailing the redemptive qualities of pain with John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in 1570, this thesis goes on to trace how the poetry and drama of the ensuing century participate in fashioning new ‘pinpricks’ with which they puncture the illusions of human mastery of the world. As the chapters that follow illustrate, the challenge of representing suffering within language provides writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with some of the most challenging topics that face us as humans. Does language have any diminishing effect on the level of pain one suffers? Is the reverse true in that imagination can reinforce one’s sense of helplessness? Where is pain located: in the body or the mind? Is suffering unique to humans? If not, do we need to reframe our conceptual understanding to include the afflictions of animals and non-human matter? Can our thoughts be understood as a form of violence that takes place within the unsuspecting brain? Suffering is not the only way some of the above concerns can be probed. The most apparent counter topic that could be employed to probe these claims’ validity is pursuing positive emotions.<sup>9</sup> However, the historical period under examination in the current study abundantly provides epochal forms of trauma raised in English Renaissance literature. The universal threat of plague and disease, the suffering on the battlefield, the execution of a king, gendered forms

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<sup>8</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 2.2.267; Michel de Montaigne, ‘Of the Inequality That is Between Us’ in *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> I am thinking here of Bradley Irish’s admission of his own project’s limitations insofar as when it comes to his study of emotions in the Tudor Court, he ‘overwhelmingly dwells on the negative’. See Bradley J. Irish, *Emotion in the Tudor Court: Literature, History, and Early Modern Feeling* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), p. 16. Similarly, Richard Strier observes that scholarship of early modern emotions ‘presents the period in dark and dour terms.’ See Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance from Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 17.

of violence, and much more filled the historical stage, the dramatic stage and poetic page of this era.

*Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* traces attempts by key English writers to affirm the philosophical province of literature. The ‘deception’ or ‘craft’ involved in the mimetic arts of poetry and drama reflects upon the ‘deceptions’ English Renaissance theorists had to employ to understand the centre of cognition itself: the imagination. This thesis reveals the connections between suffering and the imagination as they are invariably shaped by contemporary religious, medical, philosophical, and literary ideas. Building upon recent critical work by Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld and others, this thesis takes a methodological middle ground between historicism and formalism.<sup>10</sup> The close reading of the following chapters is attuned to the processes of *formation* to focus on ‘how, and why, English Renaissance writers made manifest the activity of making’ literature.<sup>11</sup> So, it follows that the writers examined here – Marlowe, Donne, Marvell, Cavendish, and Milton – challenge the reader to consider not only the work itself but also how the text is made as well as the imaginative transaction – think back to Breton’s ‘bear a part’ – that takes place in the reader’s imagination when trying to interpret the meaning(s) of the text.

A recent surge in literary scholarship attests to the varied fruits offered by interpreting literary representations of suffering in the early modern period. In particular, the dominant mode of analysis of early modern emotions – negative and positive included – revolves around the interpretive lens of reading texts to uncover the influence of the medical theory of Galen’s humoral theories.<sup>12</sup> The early moderns believed that the body’s emotions correspond to the

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<sup>10</sup> Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking: Figures of Speech in Early Modern Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), esp. pp. 1-22. See also Chloe Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama: Spectators, Aesthetics, and Incompletion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Hunt, ‘Processes of Reformation in Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*: Bells, Brass, and the Reader’s Work’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 51.2 (2021), pp. 217-42, p. 219.

<sup>12</sup> While it is impossible to list here all the scholarship on the early modern inheritance of Galen’s theories, the most famous proponent of such readings is Gail Kern Paster. See Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the*

motions of the four constitutive humours (internal liquids) that comprise the interior makeup of the body: black and yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. The resulting analysis of the ‘new humoralists’, as Richard Strier has labelled the work of Gail Kern Paster, is predicated on ‘discover[ing] the phenomenological character’ of literary representations of pain, for instance, under the rubric of a historicist reading of Galenic humoral theory in early modern culture, which, in turn, challenges the ‘post-Cartesian divisions between thought, soma, and world.’<sup>13</sup> However, this thesis does not reiterate the immanence of Shakespeare’s treatment of the subject, nor will its understanding of suffering be confined to humoral explanations. By contrast, this project challenges the critical tendency to pinpoint Shakespeare as the start of revolutionary upheaval in the literary imagination to reorient Shakespeare as an influential voice in a range of distinct perspectives. Existing studies of ‘madness’ in the period tend to assume a humoral orientation, accompanied by a gendered component, as formulated in the foundational studies of Paster.<sup>14</sup> While I do not discount the invaluable contributions of Paster, this thesis, by contrast, breaks away from the critical lens of the humoralist early modern critics in order to pay attention to how early modern writings on suffering and the imagination invite an open-ended interpretation that should not be reliant on the affordances of a medical practice (Galenism) or ideology.

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*Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). A foundational precursor to Paster’s work is Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> See Richard Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, p. 17; Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 20; Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson, *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004); Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Paster, Rowe, and Wilson, eds, *Reading the Early Modern Passions*.

At the same time, more broadly speaking, as R. S. White points out, ‘since the millennium we seem to be living through what has been dubbed ‘an affective turn’’.<sup>15</sup> While it is difficult to pin down, ‘affect theory’ is the study of ‘bodily responses to emotional stimuli’, for example, hairs raising on the back of the neck, heart-pounding, difficulties in breathing.<sup>16</sup> Whereas ‘emotion’ conjures up some sense of volition – a person feels angry, for example, and claims this emotion as their own – affective states, are, in contrast, involuntary configurations. While affect theory is rooted in twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism, there have been notable attempts in recent years to apply affect theory to early modern literature.<sup>17</sup> Of course, it is impossible to detail all of the scholars working under the rubric of ‘affective studies’ that have emerged in the past twenty years. What unites this loose gathering is an awareness of how boundaries constitute the self. Emotions are distinguished from affect, and, by extension, emotions and affect are bounded from cognition. Critical studies include Nancy Selleck’s ‘interpersonal’ formations of self and other, James Kuzner’s ‘open subjects’, Eric Langley’s ‘sympathetic subject’, and, I would add, a vibrant offshoot of early modern studies of representations of disability as most recently elucidated by Allison Hobgood. All attest to the growing proliferation of the affective turn in early modern literary studies, but also, these works demonstrate that the Renaissance self was not the product of history’s progressive teleology where the needs of the individual came to be viewed as weightier than the community.<sup>18</sup> If anything, Cynthia Marshall’s seminal study *The Shattering of the Self* reveals that violence is

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<sup>15</sup> R.S. White, ‘Reclaiming Heartlands: Shakespeare and the History of Emotions in Literature’, *Shakespeare and Emotions: Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies*, eds. R.S. White, Mark Houlihan, and Katrina O’Loughlin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-16, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies, and Form*, eds. Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> See Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); James Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods, and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Eric Langley, *Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Allison P. Hobgood, *Beholding Disability in Renaissance England* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

at the heart of early modern attempts at self-fashioning.<sup>19</sup> The theoretical perspectives identified above are intensely interested in finding new ways of speaking about how the individual views themselves in their relationship with others as well as their past and future selves. This study adds to the current scholarship by taking the Renaissance suffering subject as the means by which to rethink how early modern writers continually shifted the definition and nature of imagination.

Of course, acknowledgment of the various definitions of what is meant by the term ‘suffering’ must be understood in relation to early modern historical contexts. Building on the ‘expression’ approach pioneered by Natalie Eschenbaum and Barbara Correll in their collection, *Disgust in Early Modern English Literature* (2016), this thesis illuminates how, at this historical juncture, bodily and mental anguish were subjected to idiosyncratic and collective explanations of cause and effect.<sup>20</sup> In other words, I stress the need to recognise how rhetorical strategies of confession and critique, as deployed by writers delineating the disordered passions of the mind and body, pave the way for discussions about cognitive psychology that prevail to this day. I maintain throughout the argument that early modern writers encode literary experimentation as a prominent avenue in which the imagination can be analysed.<sup>21</sup> The question arises: what exactly is the connection between suffering and the imagination apart from the fact that the subjects of this study are literary works of the English Renaissance? The answer is usefully illustrated for the moment with a brief snapshot. Take, for

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<sup>19</sup> Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002). ‘Self-fashioning’ is borrowed from Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Natalie K. Eschenbaum and Barbara Correll, eds, *Disgust in Early Modern English Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, since initially formulating the topic of this thesis: the centrality of literature in the formation of meaning, Benedict Robinson has posited a similar claim in his study of the fictive nature of passions in the early modern period: ‘In its dependence on imagination, passion [Robinson’s all-encompassing term for emotion and affect] always has something virtual or fictive about it.’ See Benedict S. Robinson, *Passion’s Fictions from Shakespeare to Richardson: Literature and the Sciences of Soul and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 94.

the first example, the Sonnet 34 ('Come, let me write') from Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-86) collection *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). After a heated internal debate wherein the speaker constantly proposes and rejects several reasons for why he continues to write, offering 'Oft cruel fights well pictured do please', only to be rebutted by the other internal voice, "Art not ashamed to publish thy disease?", the sonnet concludes:

Peace, foolish wit; with wit my wit is marred.  
Thus write I while I doubt to write, and wreak  
My harms on ink's poor loss; perhaps some fine  
Stella's great powers, that so confuse my mind.<sup>22</sup>

In this case, the speaker's suffering – the Petrarchan trope of unrequited love – initiates the ecstatic debate of the internal wrangling voices.<sup>23</sup> However, the ecstatic voice implicates the reader when it accosts the speaker to be 'ashamed to publish thy disease'. The imagined reader is implicated here as providing a supplementary role to the warning voice of the internal conscience. In other words, the reader's mind is under examination here, not just the speaker's 'burdened heart' (2). Specifically, the *misinterpretation* of the speaker's vexation is what is at stake here. Under this reading, the 'some' of the penultimate line may be stretched to include the speaker as well as 'some'one else's attempt to 'find' the source of the speaker's confusion.

To put it another way, the 'marred wit' is a subtle disguise of the wit with which the speaker crafts a disorientated mind with the precise aim of stoking the reader's imagination to fill in the gaps of the meaning of the suffering speaker and the 'suffering' – that is, the speaker's 'harms' that have been translated into ink – of the sonnet.<sup>24</sup> In so doing, the sonnet tasks the

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<sup>22</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella, Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 166. Subsequent references to Sidney are indicated parenthetically within the text by line numbers.

<sup>23</sup> 'Ecstatic' should be read here as denoting its etymological sense of displacement, that is, to stand outside of or be estranged from oneself. Perhaps the most famous early modern usage of ecstasy is John Donne's poem of that name (1633; published posthumously). For more on early modern usages of ecstasy, see Jennifer J. Edwards, "'Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy": Space, Place, and Self in *The Comedy of Errors*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 48 (2020), pp. 125-31.

<sup>24</sup> The relation of shame, suffering, and the imagination is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

reader with engaging in the form of self-critique that resembles the (self-)argumentative sonnet at hand. Impugning that his 'wit' is 'marred', the speaker invites the reader to closely examine their own wit when they are trying to decipher these lines. Astrophil's struggle becomes the reader's, and, in this light, suffering prompts a productive anatomy of the imagination for writer and reader alike.

Scholars have recently taken up the imagination in the early modern period with huge interest. Deanna Smid's *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature* (2017) and Suparna Roychoudhury's *Phantasmatic Shakespeare* (2018) provide detailed analyses of the imagination's contested place (whether it resides in the heart or mind) as literary works responded to contemporary shifts in the religious and medical fields. Shakespeare's speech 'The lunatic, the lover, and poet / Are of imagination all compact' by Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Speech* (c. 1595) is often taken as a touchstone moment in early modern literature to seek out the manifold and contradictory nature of imagination in English Renaissance literature.<sup>25</sup> Imagination, argues Roychoudhury, should not be glossed as an abstract, purely intellectual entity that is separated from the subject's body in a Cartesian c-section, but rather, both before and after Descartes's intervention of the mid-seventeenth century, many continued to perceive the phantasmatic properties of the mind as caught up in the affective terrain of the body. Roychoudhury's explication of 'fancy' argues that Shakespeare's speaker of the sonnets – after many attempts at 'forging figurative hypotheses' – concludes that fancy cannot be localised in a physiological position (the heart or eye), because 'fancy represents a process of thinking about – thinking through – his desiring and disoriented body.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, given the

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<sup>25</sup> Theseus's speech is the subject for examination in the introductions of Smid and Roychoudhury as well as two articles by Adam Rzepka. See Smid, *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), esp. pp. 1-2; Suparna Roychoudhury, *Phantasmatic Shakespeare: Imagination in the Age of Early Modern Science* (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 2018), esp. pp. 1-26; Rzepka, "'How easy is a bush supposed a bear?': Differentiating Imaginative Production in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 66.3 (2015), pp. 308-28 and "'How like a god": Shakespeare and Early Modern Apprehension' *Shakespeare Studies*, 46 (2018), pp. 211-35.

<sup>26</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury, *Phantasmatic Shakespeare*, p. 55.



capaciousness of terms such as ‘suffering’ and ‘imagination’, this thesis focuses on a set of basic questions: How did the early moderns mobilise suffering as a form of interrogating the imagination? In other words, a new history of suffering is charted through not only showcasing how early moderns think *about* suffering but also revealing how thinking *with* suffering is possible. To rework Roychoudhury’s formulation, the glue that holds the themes of this thesis together is the desire to uncover how suffering represents a process of thinking about and thinking through the disorientated imagination.

‘I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe’, says Sir Philip Sidney’s speaker in the first sonnet from his *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) volume (5). Alternatively, if thinking is akin to the act of hunting, *Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* demonstrates that this primal need to hunt for fit words to describe one’s suffering should never be abandoned by the sheer weight of the obstacles that hinder this most profound human enterprise of expression. Moments of suffering – real or imagined – on the early modern stage or the poet’s page invite the reader to stop and imagine what it feels like to grapple with one’s own imagination. The elusiveness of what is possessed by all – the capacity for pain – foregrounds the insatiable desire for artists to capture their take on the opacity of suffering and the mind. Thus, new forms of suffering may inflict us, understandings of the imagination may change, but never does the search for the ‘fit words’ end.

Ultimately, *Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* explores how shifting ideas of the nature of imagination in early modern culture come to be intertwined with the malleable explanations for pain. It does so by analysing the English Renaissance’s critical writers beginning with John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in 1570 and ending with John Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* in 1671. Along the way, poetry, and drama are read alongside religious, medical, and philosophical documents produced in England during this time. As it will be argued, there are complex implications for the representation of suffering depends on the

writer's understanding of how imagination – the nature and process of thought itself – works. The presentation of *Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* – as evident in the chapter descriptions below – is broadly chronological from the late-sixteenth to the late-seventeenth century.

The literary texts examined here fall between the publication of the second edition of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in 1570 and the last collection of poetry Milton published in 1671. This thesis explores how the extremes of human suffering are refracted through the apogee of human brilliance – the imagination – in the canonical works as well as texts by lesser-known authors. By doing this, it aims to recover how cognition itself can be mapped onto the boundless affordances of literary narrative. In an age where the concept of literary fiction is still relatively novel, literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contains the fruits of the disparate fields of knowledge such as history, philosophy, and medicine. Indeed, while the differentiation between these disciplinary fields has since become institutionalised through the differentiation of subjects in contemporary education, no such separation existed in the early modern period. That is why this study ends with Milton's *Samson Agonistes* in the latter quarter of the seventeenth century, for it is the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that forcefully ruptures the hitherto co-existing – indeed, often co-operative – fields of inquiry.

### **Chapter Overview**

'Suffering and Language in the Early Modern Period, 1570-1671' (Chapter 1) offers a contextual overview of the various ways early moderns understood and tried to defend against the world-shattering capabilities of pain through language. The significance of this bond between suffering and language as it emerges in early modern England will be illustrated in studies ranging from the catalogue of martyrs' suffering in Foxe's writings in the 1570s to the poetry of Milton in the 1670s. The opening section focuses on how language enables the

martyrs of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Robert Southwell to view their pain as spiritually beneficial.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the thesis, we encounter alternative views to the Galenic formulation of pain such as those offered by women writers in this period. The second section takes the examples of Margaret Cavendish and Ann Collins to show how Galenic models of humoral imbalance are instead subordinated to the importance of accurate descriptions of the experience of suffering itself rather than any attempt to find causal relationships. Following this, the third and fourth sections provide an overview of alternative medical and philosophical explanations for suffering, respectively. This chapter provides the contextual background upon which the thesis grounds its close examinations of the relationship between suffering and the imagination in literary writers' works.

In this spirit, 'Christopher Marlowe: Suffering and the Natural World' (Chapter 2) explores the techniques employed in Christopher Marlowe's plays to explain and remedy their suffering. This chapter will contend that Marlowe's works represent the creative possibilities that abound when his protagonists try to find common ground between the natural world and their human afflictions. Marlowe's dramatic characters and poetic personae – from *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II*, as well as translations of Ovid – are explored through the imagery associating suffering with the natural world. How does *The Jew of Malta*'s anti-hero Barabas justify his infliction of suffering upon others when he likens himself to the 'sad presaging raven' that does 'shake contagion from her sable wings'?<sup>28</sup> Marlowe redirects attention away from the debate regarding human language's ability to lessen the pain to indicate how suffering characters turn to nature as an imaginary sanctuary wherein they can find affirmation and wisdom to grasp the contours of pain. Thus, Marlowe redirects the Christian

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<sup>27</sup> John Foxe and Robert Southwell are divided on religious grounds: the former was a fervent Protestant who writes *Acts and Monuments* as a tribute to the martyrs under Mary I's reign (1553-58) whereas Southwell was executed by Elizabeth I due to his recalcitrant Catholic beliefs.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: Everyman, 1999), 2.1.1 and 2.1.4.

solutions to the problem of pain by appropriating the redemptive benefits of language for secular purposes.

“‘So we ourselves miraculously destroy’”: John Donne and the Self-Destructive Imagination’ (Chapter 3) traces how John Donne (1572-1631) depicts the potential for the imagination to be complicit in the self-destruction that often occurs when the faculty of apprehension perpetually harms the individual’s health. Paying particular attention to Donne’s yoking of the imagination with fire, especially in his satires of the 1590s, it will be argued that the fire of the mind, in Donne’s hands, is viewed with the same suspicion and dread that we attach to the contrary nature of real fire. Indeed, concerning the suffering of Prometheus when he stole the ‘fire’ (knowledge) from the Gods, as told in Greek mythology, Donne’s early poetry is probed for evidence of the self-consuming nature of the imagination that is aligned with Prometheus’s fate wherein the tortures of the Greek Titan reflect the self-inflicted tortures of the mind. However, as he is immortal, he is forced to have his liver eaten by an eagle in perpetuity. Following this, a close reading of the meaning of ‘giddy’ will be applied to Donne’s autobiographical *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624). Claiming that giddy should be understood in its early modern context as a disorientation that straddles between mind and body (as is the case with reports on plague victims), Donne uses ‘giddy’ to describe his suffering. Donne’s *Devotions* will be utilised as evidence of his life-long struggle to adequately conceive of, and represent, the mind’s capacity for wreaking destruction upon itself.

‘Monstrous Suffering in Marvell’ (Chapter 4) uncovers what can be gained through the interpretive lens of ‘monstrous suffering’ as it pertains Andrew Marvell’s poetry in the mid-seventeenth century. Based on the criterion of monstrosity as a breaker of order-imposing categories of meaning-making (of pain), Marvell’s roughly contemporary poems ‘A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body’ (c. 1645-52) and ‘The Unfortunate Lover’ (c. 1649) pinpoint Marvell’s obsession with monstrosity at the beginning of his poetic career. To think of suffering

as transgressing the human's bounds is not, in Marvell's hands, an avenue through which he can flex his poetic anthropomorphism; a more extensive understanding of Marvell's attention to the incorporation of suffering across entities necessitates a new reading. Ultimately, this chapter aims to prove how Marvell's portrayal of suffering pushes the supposedly rigid divisions between body and soul beyond breaking point and leaves us with an imaginative conception of monstrosity that gives-and-takes from human and monster to recombine the different forms of suffering to fashion a new model of monstrous suffering.

'Knowledge is Power?: Hunting as a Trope of Imagination in Margaret Cavendish's Poetry' (Chapter 5) offers a new hypothesis regarding Margaret Cavendish's understanding of the intertwined relationship between suffering and the imagination. By attending to her poetry and philosophical tracts written in the early 1650s, it will be argued that Cavendish completely rewrites the benign depictions of the imagination as they were formulated by early modern theorists such as Sir Philip Sidney towards the end of the sixteenth century. Cavendish's 'The Prey of Thoughts' will be offered as a benchmark from which we can perceive how she imagines the nature of thoughts attaching themselves to the brain can be analogously explained by the popular early modern sport of hunting. After establishing this connection between the violence of the hunt for animals in the world of sport alongside the hunting of the mind by its thoughts, the implications of this radically new interpretation of the imagination will be explored through Cavendish's poem 'The Hunting of the Stag' from her *Poems and Fancies* (1653) collection. The slaughter of the stag by the men and hounds in this poem is, for Cavendish, I argue, a metaphoric model of the similar hunting that an individual's mind is prey to by its thoughts. What is more, accompanying close readings of Cavendish's poetry will be a keen eye to England's changing historical situation. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the English Civil Wars of the 1640s, Cavendish is inspired by the atrocities of the

Parliamentarians to breathe new life into timeworn precepts of the imagination in her attempt to convey the intertwined feelings of nostalgia and suffering of the defeated Royalist cause.

“‘A living death’: Posthumanist Suffering in Milton” (Chapter 6) interprets Milton’s representation of suffering using contemporary posthumanist theories that have surged in literary studies in recent decades. This chapter’s argument is built around the premise that Milton presents the suffering of the Lady in his early *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) and Samson in his late *Samson Agonistes* (1671) in dehumanizing ways that can be paired with the decentring of the human as articulated by posthumanist theorists such as Donna Haraway and Bill Brown. The first section’s analysis of the *Masque*’s heroine, the Lady, proposes to read her defensive mechanisms against the threat of pain as inherently suffering from an epistemic injustice. Due to her gender, the Lady’s appropriation of humanism – the preserve of males in the early modern period – challenges the reader to rethink the limits within our so-called systems of belief regarding the suffering of those excluded from the imaginary community. The middle section compares the Restored Stuart monarchy’s policies of the Act of Oblivion and posthumous executions with the impossible posthuman experience. Charles II’s politically expedient demands on the public to forget the Interregnum, while simultaneously, the bodies of the previous regime’s bodies were dug up to be subjected to execution, provides fuel for writers such as Milton to explore the broadening capacity of suffering from encompassing non-living matter. With this capacity of suffering to touch the non-living, Milton exploits it to the extreme in his depiction of suffering that pervades his final masterpiece *Samson Agonistes*. Here, in the chapter’s third and final section, it will be argued that Samson is, in fact, not a holy warrior, but, instead, he is an automaton. After examining key passages that attest to Samson’s posthumanity, this chapter turns its attention to the suffering that Samson inflicts upon his enemies as well as his repeated attempts to delineate the source of his agonies. The argument concludes with an

alternative reading of the suffering within this tragedy. Rather than reverting to the critical debates that search for the agency or passivity of Samson's infliction of pain on others and the torments that he must endure, by contrast, this chapter reads Samson's as probing the human categories of suffering. If not fully human on the one hand while fully capable of inflicting and suffering pain himself, the redemptive theological purpose of suffering falls flat in *Samson Agonistes*'s case.

As the overview of the following chapters suggests, this study ranges across poetry and drama of the late sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century. It makes what appears to be surprising connections: Cavendish and hunting, Marlowe and nature, Marvell and monstrosity, among many others. This study represents the painstaking effort – the 'painful adventure' – of literature in Renaissance England.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as the 'pleasing' publicised pain of Sidney's self-doubt and 'marred wit' (as explored above) suggests, a mode of thinking emerges wherein literary writers are engaged in the enterprise of drawing upon the opacity of suffering to distil the irresolvable – and painful – contradictions of the imagination. *Suffering and the Early Modern Imagination, 1570-1671* contends that scholarly interpretation of the imagination built around the knowledge gained by suffering is vital towards unfolding not only how early modern writers responded to changes in understanding the imagination. It also asks how the representation of suffering in literature shapes the perpetually changing conceptions of conception – the imagination – itself. In short, these writers ask us to reconsider suffering as key to unlocking Pandora's box of the human mind wherein the reader can gaze at the frightening gifts within.

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<sup>29</sup> This idea of writing as being a 'painful adventure' is borrowed from Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p. 192.

## Chapter 1

### Suffering and Language in the Early Modern Period, 1570-1671

This chapter explores how early modern writers interpret the relationship between suffering and language as an invaluable linguistic avenue to express one's selfhood. The significance of this bond between suffering and language as it emerges in early modern England will be illustrated in studies ranging from the catalogue of martyrs' suffering in John Foxe's writings in the 1570s to the final poetry of John Milton in the 1670s. This chapter asserts that these examples will help to exemplify how the theme of suffering garnered such sustained analyses in this period from writers across the spectrum of early modern literary culture. The opening section focuses on how language enables the martyrs of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Robert Southwell to view their pain as spiritually beneficial. By analysing women writers such as Cavendish and Collins's poetry in the mid-seventeenth century, the second section argues that these writers using suffering as the fundamental lynchpin of their existence formulated a kind of selfhood that was not necessarily predicated on the Galenic model that was inherited from antiquity. For women writers in this period, the Galenic models of humoral imbalance are instead subordinated to the importance of accurate descriptions of the experience of suffering itself rather than any attempt to find causal relationships. This section then explicates how women writers transferred their suffering into poetry with a 'paradoxical joy', as can be seen in An Collins and Margaret Cavendish's writings. Following this, the third section will analyse medical writings on the relationship between language and pain. Focusing on William Harvey's work, this section argues that despite his aversions to his predecessors' use of 'moral exhortations', there is evidence within his offers of medical advice an indelible belief in the



curative effects of language. For Harvey, the power of metaphor illustrates how the physician and patient can reach for more excellent knowledge to unlock nature's secrets and master human emotions. The final section will then focus on the salient philosophical debate in the early modern period – ranging from Michel de Montaigne to René Descartes's investigations – about the usefulness or otherwise of expression when confronted with the fragility of the mind and body.

Fundamentally, this chapter extends Steven Mullaney's assumption that late-Elizabethan drama is a melting-pot of ideas wherein the 'persistence of the absolute gave way... to the insistence of the relative' to examine a broader time frame and include a plethora of literary genres and non-literary sources.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this chapter branches out from Mullaney's focus on the transition or 'Reformation' of emotions in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean drama to be more inclusive regarding the temporal scope and primary sources. Thus, using the ahistorical term 'suffering' is convenient because it will be used interchangeably with the early modern equivalent term 'passions' and will be employed to denote a range of negative feelings such as grief, anxiety, depression, conscience, fear, and uncertainty. Kirk Essary points out that when analysing the terms that Renaissance writers used to describe various emotions, we should be mindful that these writers often applied emotional terms 'rhetorically rather than systematically.'<sup>2</sup> It must be noted from the outset of this chapter that these negative emotions or categories of suffering under examination often straddle across the supposed boundaries between bodily and imagined forms of suffering in terms of origin, nature, and effects. As Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan argue, there is no predominant 'script' or understanding of suffering or the relationship (if any) between the body and mind. In Meek and Sullivan's words,

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Essary, 'Passions, Affections, or Emotions? On the Ambiguity of 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Terminology', *Emotion Review*, 9.4 (2017), pp. 367-74, p. 373.

‘emotion in [the early modern] period did not follow a single template or social script, but rather was made of multiple intellectual traditions and literary practices’.<sup>3</sup> This intransigence to rest upon a single definition and trajectory of suffering offers real insight into how a culture’s accepted understandings of these most personal and intimate afflictions can potentially contradict literary writers or resist such traditional beliefs. In this sense, this opening chapter explores the interweaving contexts of how religious writers, gendered writings, medical reports, and philosophical texts all helped push language to its limits to accommodate and perhaps create positive emotional spaces out of their individual experiences with affliction.

Before this chapter delves into how the theme of suffering was taken up and adapted by individual writers, a brief explanation of this term’s various definitions is needed to highlight how it evolved in early modern culture. In a sermon delivered in Westminster in May 1608, George Abbot counsels his listeners, ‘not to be too quick, nor nimble in giving up their verdicts or censures of other men.’ To clarify this point, Abbot illustrates that even God ‘sometimes doth *suffer* the evil man to condemn [the innocent]’.<sup>4</sup> Here, then, ‘suffer’ means, as according to the *OED*, ‘to undergo, endure’ and ‘to have (something painful, distressing, or injurious) inflicted or imposed upon one’. Much like how God must ‘suffer’ or allow the innocent to be condemned by the pernicious, so, too, must we ‘suffer’ or be subject to ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ according to Hamlet’s description of our ‘mortal coil’.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, it is a natural inclination to resist rather than willingly suffer a wrong to our person or circumstances that Abbot is trying to mollify through his insistence that even the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, ‘Introduction’, *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, eds Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 1-24, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> George Abbot, *A sermon preached at Westminster 26 May 1608* (London, 1608; S.T.C. 38.5), p. 22. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 3.1.57, 66.

omnipotent God must at times suffer the wrongs of humankind. Indeed, it is the overwhelming capacity for humans to suffer for one reason or another – particularly in this time where wars, famine, and plagues were never scarce – that propelled Robert Rollock, the first regent and principal of the University of Edinburgh, to declare in a lecture in 1616, that ‘the only way whereby thou shalt come to life... The word will teach thee, that there is no other way to Heaven, but by affliction: and it will thee, that if thou be not purged and changed by affliction, thou shalt never see Heaven.’<sup>6</sup> In Rollock’s estimation, life is suffering, for privation in this life is the only way to ascend into heaven. This idea that suffering can purge – that is, cleanse – the individual of their sins, thus ensuring that they are one of God’s elect, is reiterated across the religious divides, especially during the executions of religious martyrs under the Elizabethan regime. An anonymously written pamphlet that circulated throughout London called *Remedies Against Discontentment* (1596), for example, claims that although some of the ‘most holy persons’ have been subjected to ‘misery and affliction’ it is, paradoxically, the very ‘pains which they *suffer*, [that] might further prick them forwards to forsake this miserable world. So that in the end... they enter into a way which leadeth into a better life.’<sup>7</sup> At the same time, this hope or longing for eternal salvation in the afterlife, as opposed to earthly joys, can also be subject to satire in this period. Stripped of any reverence that is due to those like ‘the most holy men’ who suffer in this world, Richard Alison’s *An Hour’s Recreation in Music* (1606) includes ‘just men do suffer wrong’ in its litany of those who in ‘whatever chance’ they may find themselves, they ‘hope thou the best’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Rollock, *Lectures upon the history of the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, 1616; S.T.C. 21283), p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, *Remedies against discontentment drawn into several discourses, from the writings of ancient philosophers* (London, 1596; S.T.C. 20869), p. 42. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Alison, *An Hour’s Recreation in Music Apt for Instruments and Voices* (London, 1606; S.T.C. 356), p. 5

As illustrated above, it appears that suffering usually pertains to subjecting or surrendering oneself to sensations of pain and negative emotions. It is the personal responses from individual writers as well as from the early modern culture at large to such situations that are most striking for our purposes. In this period (1570-1671), writers brandished their expression of their suffering as their preferred course of resistance to their circumstances. This creative tension between suffering and expression is not unique to the early modern period, but this chapter will illustrate a peculiar fascination with the theme of suffering that manifests itself in the early modern period's literature and culture.<sup>9</sup> This chapter seeks to establish the premise that intellectual relativism is an indelible fixture of discussions of suffering from the writings of Foxe in the 1570s to Milton in the 1670s. To frame these different understandings of suffering as manifested in early modern culture, I will examine four discrete areas of study (religion, gendered studies, medicine, and philosophical texts) to analyse the strikingly different ideological influences that shaped the language from within these disciplines. It is vital to note here that although this chapter offers these contextual routes to understand better how the early modern individual came to terms with their suffering, this list is not exhaustive, nor are these contextual divisions to be understood as impenetrable. As will be highlighted throughout this chapter, there is a kind of slippage or blurring between the supposedly rigid disciplinary boundaries. This underlying communal belief in the early modern period that language can be utilised to combat the negative forces of suffering deserves more sustained attention if we are to understand more fully what was at stake when individual writers chose to reinforce or deviate from linguistic patterns.

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<sup>9</sup> Key examples of studies of suffering in other literary periods include Esther Rosalind Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Susannah B. Mintz, *Hurt and Pain: Literature and the Suffering Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); and Stephanie de Montalk, *Communicating Pain: Exploring Suffering Through Language, Literature and Creative Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

## Religious Suffering: The Case of Religious Martyrs

Any examination of suffering in early modern literary depictions of the suffering subject requires careful attention to the genealogy of the various religious doctrines and precepts that helped to forge an inherent relationship between suffering, the imagination, and expression in the early modern period. As the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (2017) argue: ‘One would be hard pressed to imagine a time in history of the British nations when questions of religion were more central to the development of society and culture than the early modern period.’<sup>10</sup> Indeed, by the time Elizabeth settled into her throne in the mid-sixteenth century, religious divisions had become so entrenched that Peter Marshall goes so far as to declare that it would ‘scarcely be an exaggeration to say that every family in Elizabethan England was a religiously divided one’.<sup>11</sup> It is, therefore, unsurprising to find Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen stating that ‘emotional and bodily identification with the suffering Christ continued to have a powerful appeal for Protestant writers’.<sup>12</sup> In other words, writers from across the supposedly stringent religious divide – between Catholicism and the Reformed sects – shared a tendency to find a paradoxical delight achieved when the victim of religious persecution achieves grace through, not despite, their hardships.

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Wilcox and Andrew Hiscock, ‘Introduction: Early Modern English Literature and Religion’, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, eds. Helen Wilcox and Andrew Hiscock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. xxvii-xxiv, p. xxvii.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Marshall, ‘Choosing sides and talking religion in Shakespeare’s England’, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, eds. David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 40-56, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> As Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen notes, the difference between Catholic and Protestant views on Christ’s crucifixion can be summarised thus: ‘Catholic culture saw the Passion not only as a spectacle to behold but also as the moment at which Christ opened himself up most urgently to human participation.’ ‘Protestant Passion discourses targeted precisely the idea that Christ’s pain can be shared... and emphasized both the uniqueness and the essentially psychological nature of the Passion.’ See van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 32, 40.

Indeed, in the case of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (popularly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*), the catalogue of physical torments and executions of Protestant martyrs, particularly during the bloody reign of Queen Mary I (1553-58), is often presented in a paradoxical mood of celebration and joy.<sup>13</sup> The physical trials and tribulations that the oppressors devise to annihilate the martyr's body are contrasted with Foxe's description of the joy of the victims. According to Foxe, the 'blessed martyrs... although they suffered in their bodies, yet rejoiced they in their spirits, [...] yet were they comforted of the Lord with such inward joy and peace of conscience, that some, writing to their friends, professed they were never so merry in their lives'.<sup>14</sup> For Foxe to suggest that the martyrs' 'inward joy and peace of conscience' results from the Lord's comfort reveals that the spirit can be free from a suffering body and be 'rejoiced'. Inward freedom from the physical constraints is an imperative feature of the elect for Foxe. As John R. Knott observes, Foxe's accounts of the 'superhuman endurance' exhibited by Protestant martyrs on the eve of immense pain and equally painful execution emphasise the 'separation of the vulnerable body and the inviolable liberation of the spirit through suffering.'<sup>15</sup> 'A Man is but his Minde', writes Thomas Churchyard in 1593, and it is this sense of freedom and peace of the mind relative to the body's harms that ignites Foxe's indignation at incorrect interpretations of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> According to Foxe, the separation between the suffering of the body as opposed to the peaceful mind is the primary factor for explaining Christ's final feelings of contentment despite his suffering on the Cross. Bemoaning the fact that people only focus and 'worship all the outward implements' of the crucifixion,

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<sup>13</sup> Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* went through several editions in the latter quarter of the sixteenth century. The first publication in England was a translation by John Day in 1563. Later editions that appeared in Foxe's lifetime were published in 1570, 1576, 1580, and 1583. References from *Acts and Monuments* refer to the 1583 edition.

<sup>14</sup> John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, eds. Stephen Reed Cattley and George Townshend, 8 vols (London: Seely and Burnside, 1839), VIII, p. 668.

<sup>15</sup> John R. Knott, 'John Foxe and the Joy of Suffering', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27.3 (1996), pp. 721-34, p. 724.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyard's Challenge* (London, 1593; S.T.C. 5220), p. 48.

such as ‘the nails, the cross, and timber,’ conversely, Foxe insists on the vital importance of looking ‘inwardly’ to one’s conscience or, as he puts it in more religious terms:

To know Christ Jesus crucified, and to know him rightly, it is not sufficient to stay in these outward things: we must go further than the sensible man, we must look inwardly with a spiritual eye into spiritual things.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Foxe divides suffering from ‘sensible’ or ‘outward implements’ to the ‘spiritual’ or inward aspect of suffering. Embroiled in the religious disputes that characterised the Elizabethan regime, the emphasis on the supreme importance of interpretation (‘to know him rightly’) signifies how Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* with its searing and memorable images and descriptions of suffering became a foundational text for the Protestants to disseminate (particularly to the young) the ultimate sacrifice of their martyrs.<sup>18</sup> The influential power wielded by Foxe’s account of the martyrs for the English Protestant nation at large cannot be overstated. The ubiquity of this book towards the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century can be gauged in Patrick Collinson’s words, which deems an ‘account of the Protestant Nation without Foxe is indeed *Hamlet* without the prince’.<sup>19</sup> The peace of conscience that many Protestant martyrs felt as internally comforted by God compelled some to profess their peaceful conscience by writing to their friends. Insofar as they provide an example for English Protestants to aspire to and emulate, the ‘blessed martyrs’ underline the relationship between the ‘inward joy’ of suffering and language. The apparent

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<sup>17</sup> John Foxe, *A Sermon of Christ crucified, preached at Paules Cross the Friday before Easter, commonly called Goodfryday* (London, 1570; S.T.C. 11242.6), p. 4. For more on the role of conscience in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, see Abraham Stoll, *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. pp. 132-4.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the relationship between religious interpretation and violence, see Stephanie M. Bahr, ‘*Titus Andronicus* and the Interpretive Violence of the Reformation’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 68.3 (2017), pp. 241-70. On the influence of Foxe’s *Books of Martyrs* on young readers, see Edel Lamb, *Reading Children in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), esp. pp. 45-6.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Palgrave, 1988), p. 12. See also Jesse Lander, ‘Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*: Printing and Popularizing the *Acts and Monuments*’, *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, eds. Debora Shuger and Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 69-92.

comfort and nonchalance that Foxe's martyrs exhibit towards the attempts by their oppressors to break their body and spirit are evidenced by the exuding confidence that is entailed by Foxe's use of the word 'professed' to describe the martyrs' letters to their friends immediately before they are to endure unimaginable pain. The extent to which Foxe's description of the martyrs' merriment indicates the analgesic effects of language can be gleaned in the ability of the martyrs to compose letters declaring their peaceful consciences and surcharged feelings of merriment. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* manifests throughout an inherent reliance or necessity on the power of words to affect, and, perhaps, convert his readers.

There is a sense of mystery regarding Foxe's description of the disparity between the physical torment and spiritual 'comfort' that the Protestant martyrs feel. Despite all outward appearances, the prospect wherein a Protestant martyr's internal 'peace of conscience' is shielded and 'comforted' by God injects a sense of wonder as to how this is possible. Foxe's martyrs and their assurance that they are merry despite the betrayals of their wretched physical circumstances steer suspiciously close to the practice of Catholic martyrs since antiquity. According to James Kuzner, the Catholic martyrs employ 'the gestures and words of ceremony and devotion to convert the very "place and paraphernalia of execution" into joyous space'.<sup>20</sup> The convivial or joyous atmosphere of the Catholic martyrs is in some sense replicated by Foxe's Protestants insofar that physical suffering enables divine communication between the Christian's soul and God. The 'comfort' that Foxe's martyrs receive from their Lord is not at odds with Catholic beliefs of the value of physical suffering.

Martin Luther's declaration that the believer will 'receive so much as you believe you receive' is useful to help explain why those of the Lutheran faith would lend credence to the

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<sup>20</sup> James Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republican Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 129.



claims of the martyrs that they had never felt so merry.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Tom MacFaul and Sarah Beckwith pinpoint the emergence of the Reformation in England from the mid-sixteenth century as ushering in exaltation for the individual's subjective experience. MacFaul's view of Shakespeare's plays can also be extended to early modern religious views on suffering: '*Thinking* has an active, imaginatively transitive power... transforming the world, even if only for a moment'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Beckwith, in the same vein, locates the efficacy of Reformed beliefs and sacraments not in any external or official prescripts handed down by the religious authorities, but rather, 'in the subjective faith – and knowledge – of the worshipper rather than the objective (*ex opere operato*) work of the priest.'<sup>23</sup> The internal peace and outward expressions of merriment of the martyrs conform to this belief – that transcends religious divides – that '*Thinking*', or, more precisely, the imagination, has the power to render trivial and overcome the pains of the body in favour of the soul's transcendence.

Tomas de Villacastin's *A manuell of devout meditations and exercises* (written in Spanish 1612; translated into English by Henry More in 1623) exemplifies a similar preoccupation between establishing the endurance of suffering as a mark of salvation. How is it possible de Villacastin asks that when thinking about Christ's suffering, we inherently 'have sorrow for our sins', whereas Christ was accepting and filled with 'joy and spiritual contentment?'<sup>24</sup> Indeed, de Villacastin goes so far as to urge his readers that if they seek salvation, they must share in Christ's suffering by imagining themselves as inhabiting his place on the Cross. The believer must accordingly gather a 'great desire to suffer persecution in imitation of Christ... it is evident that neither thou nor any shall enter into the glory which is

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 240.

<sup>22</sup> Tom MacFaul, *Shakespeare and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 7. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Tomas de Villacastin, *A manuell of devout meditations and exercises instructing how to pray mentally*, trans. Henry More (St. Omer, 1623; S.T.C. 16877.5), p. 44.

not thine, but only by this way of persecution.’<sup>25</sup> While Foxe and de Villacastin are of imagination compact insofar that they both view suffering as having salutary effects, there exists a chasm regarding how the sufferer reacts to their pain. As Foxe’s martyrs feel an unyielding desire to sing and write to their friends – reaffirming the power of their voice in opposition to their oppressors – de Villacastin’s *Manuall*, on the other hand, strives to further the sufferer’s feelings of alienation and, ultimately, despair.

This alienation or shedding of oneself is vividly realised in *The Flaming Hart*, Teresa of Avila’s autobiography (first translated into English in 1611). Throughout her autobiography, Teresa’s meditations on suffering suffuse the reader with no doubt about her immense endurance of pain. Her ability to share in Christ’s pain is expressive of her ardent desire to overcome her sense of spiritual inadequacy. By imagining that she is present at the Garden of Gethsemane with the suffering Jesus is indicative of an attendant belief that one must be ready and willing to mortify or sacrifice one’s sense of self to foster a link with God. ‘[A] kind of total untying, and loosening... from all things’ is what Teresa described her mystical experience when she witnessed an image of Christ’s suffering. An incipient wish to untie oneself from physical constraints persists here. The absence of suffering is a product of ‘loosening’ one’s spirit ‘from all things’. She goes on to detail how ‘a new kind of shyness, and dislike,’ inhabits her soul, which resultingly forces her to realise (in a misanthropic fashion later parodied by Hamlet) that when considering the ‘things of this world,’ ‘it makes even our very life much the more painful to us’.<sup>26</sup> Embedded within this thought is a wish to escape from worldly existence and all its attendant suffering. Contrasting ‘this world’ with non-existence or death, Teresa imagines the afterlife, not as the frightful and unknown, but rather, a

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>26</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Flaming Hart, or the Life of the Glorious S. Teresa*, trans. Michael Walpole (Antwerp, 1611; S.T.C. 23948.5), p. 254. For more on this alienating aspect of Teresa’s relationship with God, see also, R.V. Young, *Richard Crawshaw and the Spanish Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 86-8.

consummation devoutly to be wished. Similarly, Thomas Watson (*d.* 1686) wrote in 1654 that when imagining that one is looking at Christ's bleeding wounds, 'Look on a bleeding Christ with a bleeding heart.'<sup>27</sup> The psychosomatic effects of the mere contemplation of Christ's suffering reveal how sadness and self-afflictions were conjoined in the early modern imagination as signifying a godly conscience. Suffering in this life was a prerequisite for eternal happiness.

As Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen points out, even Teresa's 'sense of becoming dead to the world is also painful' for she must persist in a purgatory of sorts wherein 'she is in an inbetween state, both cut loose from the world and not yet at one with Christ.'<sup>28</sup> For, according to Alison Shell, in Elizabethan and Stuart England, 'being a Catholic necessitated membership of an alternative community: a recusant nebulous' who uneasily commingle with their Protestant neighbours in a tense culture of censorship and secrecy.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, across the supposedly intractable religious divide, imprisoned Catholic and Protestant writers viewed suffering as necessary and even consoling so that extreme suffering merited a closer relationship between the individual and God. In the same vein, van Dijkhuizen claims that both early modern English Catholics and Protestants share the 'assumption that bodily pain can serve as a sign of truth'.<sup>30</sup> This shared assumption also manifests itself into a shared solution wherein both martyrs document the 'sign of truth' through writing down their thoughts.

While there is no sense of conformity in terms of religious matters in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is possible to discern a pattern or, at least, a similarity regarding how the faithful should understand and even benefit from their suffering. In the case

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Watson, *Gods Anatomy upon Mans Heart* (London, 1654; Wing W1125A), p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion*, p. 88.

of the Catholic martyr Robert Southwell, writing about his imprisonment where he is tortured and awaits execution, he stresses that it is through his pain that he is enabled to purge himself of any fears and embrace his fate. Southwell denies his suffering as an opposing force unjustly imposed on him and, instead, vows to enkindle a vital necessity for his suffering as it is modelled on that of Christ's torment in the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>31</sup> The internal torment of Jesus in the Garden before his capture is perhaps the most revealing account of Christ's interiority, his selfhood, his grasp of, if not his actual humanity.

What is most interesting here is that his interiority is represented in the form of a complaint. Abandoned by his sleeping disciples, aware that the Roman army is imminently bound to arrest him, it is said that Jesus looks to the skies and cries, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'<sup>32</sup> Contrarily, Southwell, in a spirit of defiance, goes on to write on the eve of his execution, 'I refuse nothing, I will embrace all, I will endure all – not indeed I, dust and ashes that I am, but Thou, my Lord, in me.'<sup>33</sup> Crucially, although separated by religious boundaries, both Foxe's martyrs and Southwell are comforted through their painful condition to arrive towards a peaceful conscience. 'Thou, my Lord, in me' chimes with the internalisation of the Lord's comfort that Foxe describes as the precursor to the martyrs' 'peaceful conscience' and defiantly rejoicing spirits. At the same time, this arrival of grace is announced through their writings. Thus, language is a guarantor that these stalwarts of their respective faiths have acquired God's salvation. The act of writing or expressing one's views participates in the spiritual or psychological transformation of one's pains into a necessary and ultimately salvific force.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'Life indeed' refers to Falstaff's endorsement in *1 Henry IV* (5.4.118-9) of an alternative life model that is similar in terms of the premise to Southwell conversion of suffering from being wretched to imitating the divine.

<sup>32</sup> Mark xv.34, Matthew xxvii.46 and Psalm xxii.1.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Southwell, *Two Letters and Short Rules of a Good Life*, ed. Nancy Pollard Brown (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. xliii.

<sup>34</sup> Jenny Mayhew makes a similar claim by pondering: 'Can literary tropes induce psychotropic transformation?' And, more specifically, 'Do godly metaphors for pain turn physical sensations, as well as concepts, from one

The comfort of Foxe's martyrs and Southwell's acceptance of his torture and death emanate from studying the example of Christ's suffering. Both Foxe's martyrs and Southwell cultivate an image of an inner sanctum that cannot be touched despite, or, indeed, reinforced by their physical suffering. In both cases, language functions as the mediator to look inwardly and transcend the 'outward implements' of their respective situations. Eliding any sense of pain, the religious martyrs are similar (despite their avowed differences) as articulating their sea of troubles enables them to set themselves up following Christ's example. This will, in turn, set forth a pattern to follow for Elizabethan and Jacobean readers of their chosen religious martyrs' plights.

### **Gender Narratives: The Worse Soul**

Femininity, in the early modern period, was a primary symbol of all that entailed inferiority. Weakness – in the physical ('corporeal') and intellectual ('spiritual') domains – is often taken up by popular (male) writers as the primary distinction between the sexes. For instance, in Shakespeare's early comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1591-2), when the clown, Crab, uses his shoes as props to represent his parents' feelings of loss at his departure, he proceeds to mix and continually shift between which shoe signifies which parent in an absurd mockery of the supposedly intractable gender positions. However, in the end, he successfully distinguishes between the shoes/parents by confidently declaring the 'shoe with the hole in it, is my mother,' for 'it hath the worser sole'.<sup>35</sup> The 'worser sole' of the shoe, it seems to Crab,

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domain of experience to another?' Mayhew, 'Godly Beds of Pain: Pain in English Protestant Manuals (ca. 1550-1650)', *The Sense of Suffering: Constructions of Physical Pain in Early Modern Culture*, eds. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen and Karl A.E. Enenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 299-322, p. 312.

<sup>35</sup> *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 2.3.15-16.

matches the mother's worse soul compared to her husband's.<sup>36</sup> Of course, a cursory glance at the historical records of how women were treated in the early modern period – compared with men – seems to suggest as much.

This section contends that women writers reveal the virtue of vulnerability that exists in a crucial tension with masculine venerations of invulnerability in the early modern period.<sup>37</sup> As discussed above, the intractable boundaries between opposing religions are superficial when unity finds grace in suffering. The lines between man and woman are also revealed as porous in that suffering forces the victim to reinterpret their pain through the power of the imagination. In her recent analysis of the so-called 'Golden Age of Melancholy' at the dawn of the seventeenth century, Erin Sullivan concludes that this period can more accurately be described as 'the golden age of *interpreting* melancholy'. She goes on to claim that 'whether one was an angel or a fiend, a cultivated scholar or a victim of a disease, might just be down to the person making the diagnosis.'<sup>38</sup> To this list, it may appear appropriate to add another pair – men and women – as somehow resembling an opposed group who diagnosed female suffering in markedly different terms and perspectives. Thus, although women may have been deprived of agency in the fields of politics, pedagogy, and society at large, linguistic freedom – as evident in the works of Collins and Cavendish – can be found as the beginnings of a wedge for modes of freedom of expression for women.

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<sup>36</sup> For more on how early modern men denied the existence of a soul within women, see Richard Sugg, *The Smoke of the Soul: Medicine, Physiology and Religion in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), esp. chap. 6.

<sup>37</sup> For more on the masculine virtue of vulnerability in early modern literature and culture, see Kuzner, *Open Subjects*, and on the value of vulnerability in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), see also Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 95.

‘Who knows the spells that in his rhetoric lurks... and men of morose minds envy his glory.’<sup>39</sup> So writes Anne Bradstreet in her elegy on Sir Philip Sidney’s death on the battlefield in the Netherlands in 1586 (published in 1638). Lamenting the loss of Sidney’s mastery of ‘poesy’, ‘rhetoric’ and ‘eloquence’ as opposed to the loss of his life, it is striking that this poem equates suffering or mourning on one side with language and poetry on the other.<sup>40</sup> Even though this elegy is a celebration of a male poet by a female poet, it is, in essence, very similar to how women understood and wrote about their woes. The continuities between Bradstreet’s celebration, if not a reification of Sidney’s ‘words’ and ‘rhetoric’ over his military and other life achievements, can be gauged by looking forwards to the mid-seventeenth-century writings of Collins and Cavendish. These writers are united insofar that their descriptions of pain, although presented in poetic form, have generally been received by critics as semi-autobiographical. Essentially, the following analysis of these writings takes heed of Sarah Skwire’s counsel to rely solely on the single poetic text – in the case of An Collins, for example – ‘all one can do is take [her, Collins] – cautiously – at her word.’<sup>41</sup>

For example, in the preface ‘To all Noble and Worthy Ladies’ in her *Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish, Chorus-like, explains to her (female) readers:

... And if (*Noble Ladies*) you should chance to take pleasure in reading these *Fancies*, I shall account my self a *Happy Creator*: If not, I must be content to live a Melancholly Life in my own World... and, though I have neither Power, Time, nor Occasion, to be a great Conqueror, like Alexander, or *Caesar*; yet, rather than not be Mistress of a World... I have made One of my own.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Anne Bradstreet, ‘An Elegy Upon Sir Philip Sidney’, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Gillian Wright provides an overview of this idea that Bradstreet is disparaged by feminist scholars as an ‘embarrassing poet.’ Citing her poetry in her collection *The Tenth Muse* (1650) as notably embarrassing for it ‘being unduly concerned with male-dominated public events and a masculinist literary history’. See Wright, *Producing Women’s Poetry: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah E. Skwire, ‘Women, Writers: Anne Conway and An Collins’, *Literature and Medicine*, 18.1 (1999), pp. 1-23, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Cavendish, ‘To all Noble and Worthy Ladies’, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668; Wing N849), unnumbered.

A ‘Melancholly Life in my own World’. For Cavendish, then, suffering is predicated on the inability of the victim to express their pain to a wider community, specifically, in this case, a fellowship of ‘*Noble Ladies*’. The speaker contends against Alexander the Great’s martial glories with her own desire to be ‘Mistress of a World’. She is the ‘Mistress’ or mother of this world, and indeed, earlier in her essay ‘The Lady Contemplation’ (1662), Cavendish likens the generative gifts of the imagination to childbirth. ‘Fancy is the Minds creature,’ she states, ‘and *imaginations* are as several worlds, wherein those Creatures are bred and born, live and die; thus the mind is like infinite Nature.’<sup>43</sup> Nestled within Cavendish’s definition of the mind as like ‘infinite Nature’ is an idea – inherited from antiquity – that our imaginative capacity can create and exacerbate a perceived illness or multiple forms of negative emotions. This thought process that accentuates pain as it tries to comprehend the malady through language echoes Lucretius’s theory in his *On The Nature of the Universe (De Rerum Natura* 1st Century BC; rediscovered 1417).<sup>44</sup> For example, the ability (or, perhaps, more fittingly, the anxiety) inherent within the imagination to collapse past and future, size, and perspective is illustrated in Lucretius’s analogy of how our minds are beset with an inexplicable, but also, universal ‘darkness’. Scrutinizing the power of the imagination to render oneself with fear, Lucretius observes:

... Our lives in very truth  
 Are but an endless labour in the dark...  
 Therefore this terror and darkness of the mind  
 Not by the sun’s rays, nor the bright shafts of day,

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Cavendish, ‘The Lady Contemplation’, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle* (London, 1662; Wing N868), pp. 181-246, p. 184. For more on how male literary writers in this period similarly viewed paternity as a crucial test of one’s selfhood, see Tom MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> On Lucretius’s rediscovery and rejuvenation in the Renaissance generally and in early modern English literature in particular, see, Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How The Renaissance Began* (New York: Norton, 2011); and Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).



Must be dispersed, as is most necessary,  
But by the face of nature and her laws.<sup>45</sup>

When it comes to writing about pain, similar to how their biological offspring must inevitably be sent out into the world for themselves, so, too, do women writers comprehend their writings about their pain as ushering in a light that is language. Thus, writing about their pain can instill one's emotions with a paradoxical sense of energy, if not even joy.

Alison Searle acknowledges this necessity – fundamentally, a necessity that enables the healing process – for the victim to describe their internal emotions (in Searle's study, she focuses on puritan and non-conformist women's writing on pain in the seventeenth century). In Mary Franklin's case, married to the non-conformist Robert, during the 1660s and 1670s, as England reverberated from the civil war's after-shocks, the internecine strife affected Mary and her family in her child being still-born. As Mary muses, 'the death of the child went very near me... one time I remember I was in bed with this child, meditating on eternity I was in a kind of agony in my thoughts... but the lord I trust hath taken her up to inherit everlasting glory'.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Foxe's account of his martyrs, this admission of a temporary feeling of 'agony' within her thoughts reveals this to be more of a plausible intimate confession in the manner of Southwell as opposed to the public celebration as in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. Eventually, after her brief respite, Mary's account soon aligns with the Christian understanding that pain was beneficial as her child was to 'inherit everlasting glory'. Also, not automatically or passively comforted by God like Foxe's martyrs, Mary's clause 'I trust' makes the promise of eternal glory hinge or depend upon something resembling a contract of sorts. In Mary's viewpoint, the

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<sup>45</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.53-4, 59-62, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Alison Searle, "'A kind of agonie in my thoughts': writing puritan and non-conformist women's pain in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England", *Medical Humanities*, 44.2 (2018), pp. 125-36, p. 130.

lord must accept the deceased child, and so, her suffering will diminish in favour of her renewed faith, as according to this mutual ‘trust’ between Mary and God.

Concurrently, women also perceived their pain as a ‘deeply social experience and, in phenomenological terms, it can be understood to exist precisely when acknowledged by another’.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, to write of her pain, the woman writer, such as An Collins and Margaret Cavendish, found pleasure in publicly expressing her inner torments. Hence, in effect, writers like Collins turned the biblical injunction that women should bring forth children in multiplied sorrow on its face as they found solace despite their pain through language. During the English Civil War, An Collins hinted that she also found paradise in her seclusion as enforced upon her by an undisclosed illness. It appears, then, that Collins unambiguously avows in her *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) that her ‘seeming desolate condicion, proved to me most delightfull’.

This ‘disconsolate condicion’ leads her to be enamoured by and driven towards the pursuit of ‘Poetry, insomuch that I proceeded to practice the same’.<sup>48</sup> The discord between ‘seeming’ and reality produces a most ‘delightfull’ feeling for Collins. Hence, Collins’s focus on her experience of her illness rather than the ‘outward implements’ or external cause of her ‘desolate condicion’ showcases the abiding interest in looking inwardly that was abundant in the case of Foxe’s martyrs. Compelled to write because of suffering, we can begin to see an overlap between the religious martyrs (on both sides of the religious spectrum) and the women writers examined above. The personal inner torments – ranging from gruesome torture methods by the state, the pangs of childbirth, or an unspecified illness – fail to destroy the victim’s world. To quote Elaine Scarry’s argument from her overarching thesis, pain, particularly torture, is ‘language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127. Emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> An Collins, *Divine Songs and Meditations* (London, 1653; Wing C5355), p. 1.

one's language disintegrates'.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Cavendish and Collins's linguistic agency is emblematic of how suffering and language became intertwined in early modern women's writings.

### **Medical Rhetoric vs. Neuroscience of Pain**

When, in 1612, the medical writer William Vaughan prescribes to his fellow physicians that, in order to 'cure [the patient's] spirituall sicknesses' it is incumbent upon the doctor to 'invent and devise some spirituall pageant to fortifie and help the imaginative facultie', and, in so doing, he foists together medical and linguistic healing methods. Although the methods described here are foreign to our contemporary age of pharmaceuticals, the physician's main objective to 'cure' or 'help' eradicate his patient's 'sicknesses' is very much in tandem with the goals of our contemporary Western medical traditions.<sup>50</sup> However, the glaring discrepancy in methodology between Vaughan's approach and our own is his insistence to 'invent and devise some spirituall pageant'. Unreliable and unsystematic in the extreme, this idea is that the patient can be cured if one helps to 'fortify' (i.e., invigorate) the patient's 'imaginative facultie' that is most interesting for our concerns.

A cursory glance at early modern medical traditions impresses upon one that medical science, as we know it, was in its nascent stages. Indeed, since the publications of Gail Kern Paster's *Humoring the Body* and *Reading the Early Modern Passions* (co-edited with Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson), it has become a critical commonplace to assign early modern conceptions of suffering as inevitably bounded in Galenic humoral formations. For example,

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<sup>49</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 29, 35.

<sup>50</sup> William Vaughan, *Approved Directions for Health, Both Naturall and Artificiall: Derived from the Best Physicians as well Modern as Ancient* (London, 1612; S.T.C. 24615), p. 90.

perhaps the most influential of the so-called ‘new humoralists’, Paster assigns Galen’s theories of the humours as the foundational bedrock for early modern understandings of ‘cognitive operations’.<sup>51</sup> Thus, critics have often sought to explain early moderns’ emotional change as arising from humoral physiological causes, or, in typical fashion as set down by Paster herself, emotional duress for an early modern was usually the sign of ‘smoky vapors ascending from the heart to brain, of bodily fumes puzzling thought and darkening judgment.’<sup>52</sup> What results, then, is an inclination within critical explications of early modern passions to scour the residue of Galenic thought in early modern representations of the full spectrum of human emotions.

Indeed, Vaughan’s desire to not only cure the patient of whatever illness, but also to somehow fortify or improve their imaginative faculty is entirely at odds with early modern medical thought and procedures. In place of an enlightening pageant instead, there is often a terrible form of torture that unleashes new, often fatal, forms of pain upon the patient rather than reducing it. Thus, for example, in 1588, when English minds were beset with imagined pain if the Spanish Armada should prevail, their bodies were also submitted to a real pain in the name of medicine. For, in William Clowes’s *A Proved practice for all young surgeons* (1588), he methodically reports how in a case wherein the patient’s leg should be removed:

[L]et there be also appointed another strong man to bestride the leg that is to be cut off, and he must hold the member very fast about the place where the incision is to be made... And he that is the Master or Surgeon who cuts off the member must be sure to have a sharp saw; also a very good catlin and an incision knife. Then boldly, with a steady and quick hand cut the flesh round about to the bones without staying... All this being orderly performed, then set your saw as near the sound flesh as well as you may, and so cut asunder the bones.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The term ‘new humoralists’ was coined by Richard Strier. See his *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> William Clowes, *Selected Writings: 1544-1604*, ed. F. Poynter (London: Harvey and Bliithe, 1948), pp. 85-6.

Although the language and description of the precise tools to be used are methodical and systematic, the execution relies on uncontrollable variables such as the steadiness and speed of the apprentice and surgeon's hands, respectively.

Clowes's imperative is for the flesh and bone to be successfully cut off without any patient's interruptions or hindrance. On the other hand, Vaughan is concerned with the physical as well as the spiritual well-being of his patient. Compassion trumps precision, it appears, regarding the desire and methods of these medical practitioners. However, if Vaughan's approach somehow represents itself as a kind of *volte-face* from the earlier – arguably less successful and caring – medical practices of Clowes's, what unifies these physicians is their mutual dependence on rhetoric to put the patient at ease. Essentially, Clowes suggests that before the surgeon and the apprentice should begin the operation, the patient should receive 'some good exhortation by the minister or preacher.'<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to note the blend of medical and spiritual methods as advocated by both physicians here. Indeed, as Alec Ryrie points out: 'Medicine was', according to every 'respectable Protestant', 'God's provision for the sick, just as food was his provision for the healthy'.<sup>55</sup> While in our contemporary era, the disciplinary boundaries are almost exclusively rigid, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Lianne Habinek points out, the emerging field of neuroscience and the ancient art of literature and rhetoric 'cited, borrowed from, overlapped, stole from, and understood one another on a fundamental level that would be perhaps inaccessible to us today.' Habinek clarifies this point further by stating that although the fields of science and literature 'were relatively discrete areas of study... their boundaries were blurred more often than not'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 127.

<sup>56</sup> Lianne Habinek, *The Subtle Knot: Early Modern English Literature and the Birth of Neuroscience* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), p. 20. In the same vein, Margaret Healy argues that 'medical discourses constitute themselves through their intersection with other discourses'. See Healy, 'Seeing' Contagious Bodies in Early Modern London', *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 157-68, p. 158.

Clowes's patient is also fortified in preparation for the operation by way of a similar spiritual pageant. Crucially, notwithstanding their differences, Clowes primarily concentrates on removing a patient's leg whereas Vaughan is concerned with fortifying the mind – both physicians utilise the analgesic effects often perceived to be within the domain of language, specifically, the art of rhetoric.

The 'moral exhortation' of Clowes's ministers and the 'spirituall pageant' devised by Vaughan, with their faith in medical treatment, showcases the validity of Ryrie's view that, despite the differences between the medical profession and religious devotion, 'medical treatment of illness must always be contained *within* spiritual treatment'.<sup>57</sup> In Stephen Pender's study of the relationship between rhetoric and medicine, he argues for the use of rhetoric as a form of diversion. To ward off 'excessive passions', the physician, in a similar manner to Vaughan's 'spirituall pageant', should distract his patient with 'mirth'.<sup>58</sup> Charges against the vain and unnecessary use of a 'spirituall pageant' as an emotional panacea indicate the shift in medicine from the older Galenic models to an understanding of the human body (and suffering) as mere constituent parts of a biological machine. As opposed to the human body's spirituality, this instrumentality is epitomised in the seismic shift in medicine's goals and methods ushered in by William Harvey (1578-1657). Fascinated with reading about Galen's anatomical dissections and, closer to his own time, Vesalius in the sixteenth century, Harvey's contributions to early modern medicine extend far beyond his discoveries of how the blood circulates throughout the body through arteries and veins. He throws the physician's rhetoric and the power of words, in general, to help the patient in any way into the dustbin of history. In his *Anatomical Exercitations* (1653), when Harvey turns his attention to the still tried method of Galen's blood-letting, he has some harsh words, not for their methods, but instead for their

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<sup>57</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, p. 127. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>58</sup> See Stephen Pender, 'Rhetoric, Grief, and the Imagination in Early Modern England', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 43.1 (2010), pp. 54-85, p. 55.

unscientific approach. The persistence of mystery or even magic insofar that the physicians can only attribute to the success of their methods ‘as it were a charm [that] take[s] away all pain and grief’.<sup>59</sup> Empowered by the ocular proof of his anatomical dissections, Harvey lampoons the non-scientific approach of ‘moral exhortations’ or ‘spirituall pageants’ employed by Clowes and Vaughan. He goes on to undermine this spiritual perspective on pain by deriding the intangible or, more precisely, the non-observable relations between language and pain.

For Harvey, to attempt and heal a patient through words, one might as well (in a particularly Shakespearean mould) ‘persuade a blind man that the Sun is clear and out-shines all the stars in the firmament’.<sup>60</sup> In Harvey’s opinion, physicians do little to combat the patient’s pain if they ‘having nothing agreeable to sense’, that is, the five empirical senses, to measure and reduce pain. He goes on to dismiss how ‘they cavil at it with vain assertions... with idle and frivolous arguments, and bark at it besides with a great many other words... by which they do no more than show their vanity, and folly, and their baseness, and want of arguments’.<sup>61</sup> Laced throughout this passage by Harvey is an explicit attack on untrained physicians. Disgusted with how these physicians plume themselves with ‘idle and frivolous arguments’, following this argument showcases their ‘vanity’ and ‘folly’. In Harvey’s view, what is worse is that they almost degenerate to a kind of ‘baseness’. Baseness is pinpointed through reference to their use of language, which is but a primitive ‘bark’ if listened to attentively. The emphasis of Harvey’s superior social class marks his aspersions with other physicians as arising from class prejudice.

This is evident when he belittles his uneducated competitors as infected with the social disease of ‘baseness’. This social prejudice finds itself resonating in similar terms with

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<sup>59</sup> William Harvey, *The Anatomical Exercitations of Dr William Harvey, concerning the motion of the heart and blood* (London, 1653; Wing H1083), p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68. For the Shakespearean echoes, see *King Lear*, Edgar’s speech convincing his blinded father (Earl of Gloucester) that they are standing on the Cliffs of Dover (4.6.12-25, 27-29).

contemporary poetical treatises of the period. George Puttenham, for example, invests his *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589) with similar concerns for social implications that nestle within Harvey's *Anatomical Exercitations*. A notable example is Puttenham's revulsion for the popular taste for rhyming couplets, as he goes on to declare this verse as more fitting to be sung by 'cantabanqui' (itinerant ballad-singers) rather than poets. Indeed, developing almost into a full-blown rant, Puttenham neglects his classification and examples of poetic techniques in order to classify these incessant rhymes sung in the streets as enjoyed by:

boys or country fellows that pass by them in the street; or else by blind harpers or that give a fit of mirth for a groat... and in taverns and alehouses and other such places of *base* resort... Such were the rhymes of Skelton; usurping the name of a poet laureate... pleasing only the popular ear. In our courtly maker we banish them utterly.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, the proper realm for interpretation and, therefore, medical diagnosis, for Harvey, remains indelibly with the eyes. Through the experience of anatomical dissection and examining the internal machinery of the human body, remedies can be suggested for combating pain.

Even though Harvey is fixated on the liabilities of 'vain assertions' and 'idle and frivolous arguments' of the barking physicians, he cannot escape from indulging his vanity. For instance, within his *Anatomical Exercitations*, Harvey projects his profession as being guided by the incontrovertible proof of the body's reception to pain as 'we must confer with our own eyes'. Immediately after this affirmation of this materialist viewpoint, he then injects a quasi-divine and mysterious counterpoint insofar that he adds one should 'take our rise from meaner things to higher' by allowing ourselves to be guided by '*Nature* herself'. Consequently, we must follow 'the path she chalks out must be our walk' and if one stays on this path, it

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<sup>62</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition*, eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 173. Emphasis mine.



follows, then, that ‘we shall be at length received into her Closet-secrets.’<sup>63</sup> The ‘Closet-secrets’ evoke intimacy and an elusive mystery at the same time. It is an apt description of nature, for even though nature surrounds us, we need the resources of nature to survive, and therefore we are intimate with her products, yet, we are often confounded and deterred from learning how to know or even control its machinations. The divinity bestowed upon an omnipotent and anthropomorphised ‘*Nature*’ instils seductive religious meanings. The path is completed in an uncertain time, as elicited by Harvey’s vague use of the unquantifiable ‘at length’. At which time, we will be received just like the religious elect into a sublime state of being.

Thus, while Harvey may account himself as on the right(eous) path towards greater knowledge, his language undermines his desire to designate himself as apart from those like Clowes and Vaughan who wish, through language and the power of interpretation, to alter the patient’s sense of discomfort. This is incongruous insofar that while, on the one hand, Harvey upholds the sense of sight as the primary and most rational form of investigation and interpretation, his accommodation of a mysterious, quasi-divine entity in the form of ‘*Nature*’ suffuses this with a materialist bent. This materialism is evident not only in the presence of a divine overseer but also in the style of Harvey’s argument that in a zealous commitment to his convictions.

Thus, far from resembling a disinterested, scientific medical practitioner, Harvey more closely resembles a victim suffering from fantastical or imagined pain – wherein their ability lies not with any definite or observable facts but, instead, with their imaginative capacity to invent words and phrases to describe their pain. Ironically, Harvey falls into the same category as the ‘barking’ physicians as he engages in a kind of ‘catastrophic materialism’. This ‘catastrophic materialism’ is a thought-process defined by Gerard Passannante that ‘enables a

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<sup>63</sup> Harvey, *Anatomical Exercitations*, p. A33.

seeing beyond the sensible', which is evident in Harvey's conjuring of '*Nature herself*'. However, as Passannante goes on, this kind of thinking can 'devolve into a kind of anxious thinking' insofar that if one attempts to demystify or uncover 'Closet-secrets', it often reveals the mind's attachment to its fictions.<sup>64</sup>

### Philosophical Approaches

'If the body finds relief in complaining, let it do so... if that distracts its torment, let it shout right out'.<sup>65</sup> Michel de Montaigne's designation of language here as the ultimate physician capable of achieving some form of 'relief' raised questions that English philosophers in Montaigne's wake repeatedly tried to examine and further complicate. This uncertainty, or rather, this mystery regarding the body's 'relief in complaining', also inflects early modern discussions of the body and soul's relationship. The question of 'just how the physical body and non-physical spirit interact' is one that English writers, although influenced by the seminal contributions of Montaigne, continually find it troublesome to provide plausible answers.<sup>66</sup> Writing in the same year as the English Civil War erupted (1642), Sir Thomas Browne offers his readers the poignant reminder that to 'shout right out' is not as simple as Montaigne wishes it to appear. As Browne attempts to describe how the human body is composed, he reinforces that language can increase the difficulties in differentiating between our physical and spiritual selves. He concedes: 'We are only the *amphibious* piece between a corporall and spiritual

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<sup>64</sup> Gerard Passannante, 'On Catastrophic Materialism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 78.4 (2017), pp. 443-464, p. 460.

<sup>65</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 699-700.

<sup>66</sup> Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 8.

essence'.<sup>67</sup> For the vague and all-encompassing term 'amphibious' employed by Browne betrays his self-assured declaration with an uneasy feeling of uncertainty regarding the possibility of distinguishing between the 'corporall' and 'spiritual'. Unable to discern where the 'corporall' ends or the 'spiritual' begins, and vice versa, Browne's observation injects some complications into the methodical approach of 'relief in complaining' as previously espoused by Montaigne. These complications are later realised by the French essayist elsewhere in his writings, where, like Browne's 'amphibious' description, Montaigne suggests, a 'narrow seam between the soul and body, through which the experience of the one is communicated to the other.'<sup>68</sup>

In his essay 'Of the Power of the Imagination', Montaigne offers his readers examples of puzzling anecdotes to showcase this faculty's immense power. The vivid power of imagination is explored by Montaigne using an anecdote to describe what, in the late sixteenth century, would invariably be known as 'fanciful', 'fantastical' or 'imagined' forms of suffering. By virtue of Montaigne's penchant for anecdotes, the reader encounters a colourful tale where a woman '*thinking* she had swallowed a pin with her bread, was screaming in agony as though she had unbearable pain in her throat'. Although he goes on to clarify that this 'was only a fancy and notion derived from some bit of bread that had scratched her as it went down,' the ability of the woman to imagine 'unbearable pain' for herself triggers a moment of speculation. If Montaigne does not view this as a revelation on the woman's part, he considers himself that 'all this may be attributed to the narrow seam between the soul and body'. While this anecdote supports the French essayist's contention that he does 'not find it strange that imagination brings fevers and death', he does, however, qualify this argument.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, as the search for a

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<sup>67</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642; B5166), pp. 64-5. My emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, p. 90.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

unifying theory or essentialist nature of humanity is averse to his guiding principle of the *Essais*, he therefore elaborates:

[I]n the study that I am making of our behaviour and motives, fabulous testimonies, provided they are possible, serve like true ones. Whether they have happened or no... they exemplify, at all events, some human potentiality, and thus their telling imparts useful information to me. I see it and profit from it just as well in shadow as in substance.<sup>70</sup>

The modesty that is characteristic of Montaigne's format and language illustrates the abiding sense of relativism that undergirds his examination of the imagination. The sustained conversation that early modern writers engaged with the mind often proceeds from a perspective that contradicts, or even directly opposes, contemporary medico-philosophical writings that seek to find external or somatic causes for internal, non-physical, or imagined afflictions.

Montaigne gives voice to this strain within the imagination to tackle the strains and pains of the mind itself. As he admits in his essay 'Of Moderation':

But to speak in good earnest, isn't man a miserable animal? Hardly is it in his power, by his natural condition, to taste a single pleasure pure and entire, and still he is at pains to curtail that pleasure by his *reason*: he is not wretched enough unless by *art* and *study* he augments his misery:

We have increased by art the troubles of our lot.  
Propertius<sup>71</sup>

As a man cannot 'taste a single pleasure pure and entire,' so, too, must man understand his suffering as being intertwined with his imaginative faculties. To quote Propertius in saying that we increase our troubles 'by art', Montaigne suggests, then, that this idea – inherited from an antique source – that 'art' or the individual's imagination often exacerbates the victim's

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Works*, p. 180. Emphases mine.

sensation or feeling of pain.<sup>72</sup> The active force of the imagination to ‘augment’ or increase feelings of misery or, for that matter, any emotion – negative or positive – is a focus of attention for the philosophers who followed in Montaigne’s wake.

According to Montaigne, man cannot taste ‘a single *pleasure* pure and entire’, for Sir Francis Bacon, it follows that the adverse is also true. In other words, in his essay ‘Of Adversity’, pain is ‘not without comforts and hopes.’ In a manner that would have pleased the martyrs and women writers, Bacon pinpoints adversity as the prelude to ‘best discover virtue’. Crucially, moreover, Bacon affirms the power of pain to produce great literature. When comparing the Old and New Testaments, Bacon concludes that ‘Adversity is the blessing of the New; which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God’s favour.’ Bacon concludes by stating triumphantly that the ‘pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Salomon.’<sup>73</sup> The reservation of pain, or, more specifically, the writings of afflictions, signify how the relationship between language and pain is also entrenched in early modern English philosophical thought. This idea is that humans can express their internal thoughts and feelings through language that supposedly elevates them over the automatic responses to pain expressed in the groans of animals that continue to perplex and animate early modern philosophy.

At approximately the same time that William Harvey was conducting his dissections and uncovering the human organism’s internal machinery, René Descartes proposed that the sensation of pain is but a glitch of sorts in this machine. While Harvey insists upon deriding the ‘vain assertions’ of the medical quacks, Descartes likewise upholds that through recourse to empirical data, one can uncover the psychological and physiological processes that control

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<sup>72</sup> For more on this correlation between art and fantastical pain in early modern literature, see Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy*, pp. 87-125.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Major Works: Including New Atlantis and the Essays*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 349.

pain. For, as Alvin Snider avers, Descartes's theories stand out not through 'his dualism per se but his account of physical bodies as defined entirely by their mechanistic qualities.'<sup>74</sup> For example, in his *Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes concludes with the advice that suggests we are not merely passive receptacles to our 'passions' or emotions, but instead, we are engaged in a kind of competition for emotional mastery:

[P]ersons whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life. It is true that they may also experience the most bitterness when they do not know how to put these passions to good use and when fortune works against them. But the chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions and to control them with such skill that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy.<sup>75</sup>

Like Harvey's attempts to uncover nature's secrets, here, too, Descartes firmly believes that 'wisdom' will enable one to make the pain or evils 'bearable' but 'even become a source of joy'. This translation of one's tribulations into a 'source of joy' can readily be found in the poetry of Southwell during his continual efforts to avoid capture by the English authorities.

Contrary to diminishing the quality and output of his poetry, Southwell's suffering inspired him to write a poem ('The Burning Babe') that is said to have rankled Ben Jonson as he 'would have been content to destroy many of his poems to have written [Southwell's]'.<sup>76</sup> Knowledge (of suffering) is power, and, in Descartes's opinion, it appears that it can be utilised to subjugate pain. Turning towards Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), an analysis of his poetic preface reveals the tension between imagination and reality that the excess or misuse of the former can negatively infect the latter.

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<sup>74</sup> Alvin Snider, 'Cartesian Bodies', *Modern Philology*, 98,2 (2000), pp. 299-319, p. 306.

<sup>75</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham et al, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), I, pp. 403-4.

<sup>76</sup> See James Shapiro, *1606: William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 185.

In his *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton perhaps startles his readers – both then and now – as he poetically muses on his own experience with ‘sour melancholy’:

When I lie, sit, or walk alone,  
I sigh, I grieve, making great moan,  
In a dark grove, or irksome den,  
With discontents and Furies then,  
A thousand miseries at once  
Mine heavy heart and soul ensconce,  
All my griefs to this are jolly,  
None so sour as melancholy.<sup>77</sup>

Surprisingly, according to Jonathan Bate, Burton begins his attempt to ‘anatomise the human mind’ with a poetic foray that prefaces what is otherwise a medico-philosophical examination of melancholy.<sup>78</sup> As Erin Sullivan notes, the poetically-constructed narrator of the ‘Abstract’ inclines towards imagining ‘melancholy’s negative potential’, while at the same time, he ‘says little about the bodily discomforts of the condition... but he does offer a frightening picture of the many *mental* and spiritual terrors to which it leads.’<sup>79</sup> For there is nothing inherently ‘irksome’ in the den or one’s location, but thinking makes it so. Alternatively, to Vaughan and Harvey’s belief in the power of ‘pageants’ and medical experience, for Burton, instead, it is the impetus of the victim to overcome suffering by themselves. Restructure one’s thoughts, Burton advises his readers, and by being ruled by ‘reason, satisfy thyself... wean thyself from such fond conceits, vain fears, strong imaginations, restless thoughts.’<sup>80</sup> This difference of opinion regarding how best to remedy an ill imagination can be gauged in Descartes’s compromising terms, wherein he finds ‘neither our imagination nor our senses could ever confirm the existence of anything, if our intellect did not play its part’.<sup>81</sup> When it comes to suffering,

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Jonathan Bate, ‘*The Anatomy of Melancholy* revisited’, *The Lancet*, 389 (2017), pp. 1790-2, p. 1790.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>80</sup> Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, p. 106.

<sup>81</sup> Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 80.

Descartes's interpretation methods suggest that although pain results from external stimuli, we can internalise it and play our part with false fears and anxieties.

Descartes was not without his shadows of self-doubt. Reflecting on his mission to test received opinions on the mind and body in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes reveals a nagging pain. He feels like 'a prisoner who is enjoying imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can.'<sup>82</sup> The use of simile to comprehend and communicate his pain is vital. This 'dreaming episode' of Descartes's effectively aligns him with Garrett Sullivan, Jr.'s analysis of sleep as it manifests itself in English early modern literary conventions. For instance, Descartes's use of the dreaming prisoner simile to convey his situation is evocative of the premise of the internal conflicts within the 'romance episode'. These conflicts include whether or not to partake in "hard labour when I wake" vs. "peaceful sleep," toil vs. laziness, active philosophical inquiry vs. passive acceptance of received opinion.'<sup>83</sup> Descartes's example of his illusion that he is a dreaming prisoner reminds one of Montaigne's example of the woman whose imaginary powers of illusion inflicted enormous pain on her as she imagined herself to have swallowed something sharp.

This continuity regarding how the significant power of the imagination can dupe and temporarily control the physical sensations of the unnamed woman in Montaigne's anecdote and Descartes highlights the ubiquity and vividness of false fears or imagined sufferings. Embedded within both descriptions of the frightening, but also, the singular force of fantastical pain is a testament to the imagination's unparalleled control of one's equilibrium. Montaigne's wish to profit from recording true 'human potential' to Descartes's vision of himself as a

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<sup>82</sup> Descartes, *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 73-122, p. 79.

<sup>83</sup> Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment: Vitality from Spenser to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 141.



prisoner precisely when he contemplates his mission showcases how the fear of suffering often encroaches in our thoughts contemplating personal goals. Rather than tending towards dreams of success, fantastical pains ensue, thereby epitomising the propensity for harmful thoughts as a marker of selfhood that is overwhelmingly vulnerable to dissolve. Descartes's method of understanding the human body is revolutionary because he emphasises the body's mechanistic and permanently split nature from the mind. Inherent in his writings is an unyielding belief in the tradition in the power of language – the written word – to arrest and articulate the negative emotions that a human is prone to experience. To try and give form to the thoughts and emotions that spring from a confused mind results in a test of the artist's grasp of the sublime.

### **Conclusion**

The representation of pain and suffering in the religious, gendered, medical, and philosophical writings of the early modern period owes its popularity to its constant exploration and experimentation of the many afflictions that can confront one's mind and body. From Robert Southwell's ability to receive himself to his martyrdom in the same vein as Jesus in Gethsemane to the rigorous medical writings of Harvey or philosophical interventions of Descartes, it is possible to discern a pattern of metaphoric language as a powerfully seductive anaesthetic. The written testimonies attest to the reader the capacity of language to not only describe the deprecations and loss of humanity that often infects a person's afflicted mind but, crucially, there remains through the desire to communicate and share one's feelings, an entrenched belief that these words will serve the purpose of internal liberation. An individual's commitment to unwaveringly guide us through the raw emotions of their bleakest moments using the tools of memory, imagination, and language conveys an inherent aspect of humanity – strengthened by suffering – to find solace in mediating one's thoughts and emotions to another. The exorcism of pain is made possible in the recording suffering experiences, which, in turn, forces the reader to bear witness to a languishing soul. Paradoxically, comfort is found

through this process of describing one's own sense of confusion that surrounds the failed attempt to locate one's emotions within the human body.

The predominance of a single explanation, be it religious, Galenic, or philosophical, was subsumed under literary interrogations' relative merits. This consensus regarding the mastery of pain through language unifies these supposedly intractable belief systems that are also apparent within the writings of contemporary English literary writers that are the focus of the remaining chapters of this study. As illustrated above, there is no definite sense of discrete disciplinary boundaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we find in our contemporary times. Recourse to literary or poetic techniques of figurative language to describe their pain is a unifying feature of the examples discussed above. The generation of debate that propelled successive writers to probe the bonds between language and human suffering that flourished throughout this period provides a richer understanding of our universal responses to physical and spiritual wounds.

Early modern culture is saturated with concerted efforts from martyrs to doctors to understand and experiment with suffering's relationship with language. The capricious imagination and control of language suffuse the writer with a persistent feeling of paradoxical joy. As a result, the significance of literary writers to probe the vicissitudes of the suffering of the body and mind forms as a fertile source of debate. Updating or defying conventions of suffering influences writers to interfere with old or create new definitions of suffering. The texts discussed in this opening chapter help reconstruct how the topic of suffering came to the forefront of early modern culture and provided a theoretical underpinning for studying the literary culture's appropriation of these accepted theories and definitions of the human body's negative emotions.

## Chapter 2

### Christopher Marlowe: Suffering and the Natural World

Why talk we not together hand in hand,  
And tell our griefs in more familiar terms?  
But thou art gone and leav'st me here alone,  
To dull the air with my discursive moan.  
(*Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 1.1.245-8)<sup>1</sup>

This chapter argues that Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) engages with early modern debates about the relationship between the natural world and the suffering individual throughout his dramatic works. Marlowe sets about representing the creative possibilities that abound when one tries to find common ground between nature and their pain. In other words, when the characters of Marlowe's play worlds need to vocalize their suffering, they attempt to project their feelings onto that of the surrounding natural environment. This chapter explores how, in Marlowe's works, the natural world ties into human suffering. To aid their understanding of their tribulations, Marlowe presents characters employing the imagery associated with the natural world, referencing its landscape, and aligning with the plight of animals. The first section of this chapter traces in plays such as *Edward II*, *The Jew of Malta*, and Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Elegia VII*, the use of tropes of nature in the discourse of suffering in which our tragic human condition is amenable to the explanations, likenesses, and processes of the natural worlds and their related phenomena. Specifically, Isabella's yoking of her suffering to the solitude of the forest, for example, paradoxically ignites her manipulations of Mortimer as she pledges her support in overturning the king's actions. The second section analyses the criticisms of early modern medical prejudices and traditional poetic (Petrarchan) representations of suffering as they appear in *I Tamburlaine* and the poem *Hero and Leander*.

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Marlowe's plays refer to *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: Everyman, 1999). Subsequent citations are indicated parenthetically within text by part, act, scene, and line number.

It reveals how Marlowe depicts the natural world as a constant resource for alleviating the pain of characters and poetic speakers. Although kinship with nature may provide some relief in the same fashion as religious devotion, it is achieved at the cost of one's firm sense of selfhood.

In the quoted example above that serves as this chapter's epigraph, Aeneas, abandoned by his mother, the god, Venus (shortly after his close escape from the siege of Troy) in Marlowe's play *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c.1587-8) decides to lament his suffering. Aeneas's decision '[t]o dull the air with my discursive moan' gives voice to early modern anxieties concerning how suffering can potentially erode our sense of humanity. Intense pain can quash our sense of fellowship with the rest of humanity and our sense of individuation, selfhood, or human exceptionalism. As a result, the natural environment may offer some residual sense of community for the victim to understand and access one's isolation through language. Marlowe provides his reader/audience with a kaleidoscope of suffering characters and poetic speakers that amounts to fashioning a bond between suffering and the natural world. First, the natural world must be understood through a working definition. A notoriously slippery term – both then and now – nature, as Raymond Williams warns, is 'perhaps the most complex word in the language'.<sup>2</sup> The natural world in Marlowe's time was the part of the world that was hitherto been left unexploited or altered by man. The rural landscape, the countryside brimming with animals and presided over by the weather and sustained by the air, are all elements of the natural world. Endowed from the start with associations with the Garden of Eden, it is unsurprising, then, that there should be an unyielding temptation to conjoin thoughts of the unspoiled natural world with a fear that this will not last and suffering – in nature and humanity – is always present. As Robert N. Watson puts it, the natural world 'is not finally a simple truth, but is instead chaos', and he goes on to argue that early moderns also found nature essentially indeterminate. Indeed, when one contemplates nature, there is an inherent tension, especially

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Flamingo, 1983), p. 219.

when one is suffering, for '[a]nxieties about being dominated by nature, or being too deeply implicated in it, gave way to anxieties about being alienated from it.'<sup>3</sup>

This chapter probes how Marlowe's suffering characters attempt to compare their situation in opposition to, or, in tandem with, the state of the natural world. For instance, in the above passage, if Aeneas is to be denied sharing his grief in 'familiar terms', he remains determined to 'moan' 'alone'.<sup>4</sup> Aeneas expresses the belief that conveying our thoughts, however painful, ineffectual, or unheeded, through language can still bestow beneficial, even analgesic effects. Nicholas Breton's poem 'Discourse on the Death of S.P.S. Knight' (1591) embodies the immense value early moderns upheld for the potential of language to provide salvific qualities when overcome with suffering: 'Let me set [write] downe some touch of my distresse, / That some poore soule may helpe to beare a part'.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, for Aeneas, pain can be eschewed by conversing 'hand in hand' as we 'tell our griefs in more familiar terms'. This rhetorical question is devoid of poetic flourishes as Aeneas's plaintive question reflects his desperate desire for 'more familiar' rather than ornate styles to convey pain. This 'familiar' or plain style is almost immediately subverted as Aeneas proceeds to inject figurative language ('dull the air') and a rhyming couplet 'alone/moan' as he ironically articulates the fact that his language is reduced to a 'discursive moan' that 'dull[s] the air'. For Aeneas, his 'discursive moan' forges a community between his suffering and the natural world in that the air, the vital substance of natural life, will 'dull' or darken in response to his woes. Indeed, to 'dull the air' with one's moans suggests that the air has been shorn of its intangibility to resemble the cruel shredding of Aeneas's equilibrium. Barely escaping from the destruction of Troy, Aeneas is quick to suffer again as his mother abandons him to endure the cruelty of earthly existence

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<sup>3</sup> Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 332, 333.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1605-6), in which the eponymous protagonist similarly laments that he has 'no wife, no parent, child, ally, / To give my substance to' (1.2.73-4). Taken from Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Breton, *Breton's Bowre of Delights* (London, 1591; S.T.C. 3694.7), p. 5.

alone. In response, Aeneas's determination to 'dull the air with my discursive moan' is rich with oxymoronic connotations.

A 'discursive moan' is an oxymoron that signifies how Aeneas's linguistic abilities are affected through suffering. On the one hand, 'discourse' evokes an argument 'characterized by reasoned argument or thought', according to the *OED*'s definition of 'discursive'; on the other, to 'moan' is indicative of a primal, animalistic sound utterly devoid of reason or thought. As it fluctuates between precision and instinct, this language is evidence of a diminishing sense of subjectivity and even human exceptionalism. It is this straddling between humanity's relationship with the natural world often at the expense of one's firm sense of selfhood – mainly through the added lens of a character who suffers which is a topic continually revisited and refashioned by Marlowe and will, in turn, provide the focus of this chapter.

### **The Forest**

Near the beginning of *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One* as Mycetes (the first of many of Tamburlaine's victims throughout the two plays) faces inevitable defeat and is fleeing for his life. He does, however, have time to pause and offer a searing condemnation on 'he that first invented war!':

They knew not, ah, they knew not, simple men,  
How those were hit by pelting cannon shot  
Stand staggering like a quivering aspen leaf  
Fearing the force of Boreas' boist'rous blasts!  
In what a lamentable case were I  
If nature had not given me wisdom's lore!  
For kings are clouts that every man shoots at,  
Our crown the pin that thousands seek to cleave.  
Therefore in policy I think it good  
To hide it close – a goodly stratagem,  
And far from any man that is a fool.  
(2.4.1-12)

The suffering and hopelessness that Mycetes witnesses all around him on the battlefield provokes him to consider, through simile, how the machinations of war ('pelting cannon shot') strip men of their humanity as they are forced to stagger 'like a quivering aspen leaf'. Despite his overarching premise that war is an invention of man that serves humanity's acts of self-destruction, Mycetes, instead, relies upon the natural world's conventional imagery to adequately convey the full range of the devastating effects of war. The confluence of the natural world and suffering is immediately reinforced as Mycetes infers that his 'lamentable case' is a direct result of 'nature' having given him 'wisdom's lore'. At the same time, this self-knowledge, or 'wisdom's lore' as Mycetes calls it, gained by proxy through the natural world can often lead one still to a 'lamentable case' like Mycetes. As his self-description of his language as a 'discursive moan' suggests, Aeneas's lamentation rapidly degenerates from reasoned outbursts into primitive, animalistic cries which signify how the victim's humanity has been eroded. For Marlowe's characters, their suffering induces one to consider how their situation chimes with the state of nature.

Isabella, the despondent and neglected Queen to the titular protagonist of Marlowe's historical tragedy, *Edward II* (c. 1592-3), first enters the stage and silently brushes past a discontented group of England's barons. Frustrated and alienated in response to the King's preferential treatment of his favourite (and lover) Gaveston, the noblemen are resolved to no longer 'suffer this' and are comparing abuses they have endured under Edward's ineffectual leadership in order to further discredit the King in anticipation for their rebellion (1.2.14). Mortimer Junior, noticing the queen and interrupting their talk of treason, asks, 'Madam, whither walks your majesty so fast?' Not breaking her stride, the Queen answers:

Unto the forest, gentle Mortimer,  
To live in grief and baleful discontent,

For now my lord the king regards me not,  
But dotes upon the love of Gaveston...  
And when I come he frowns, as who should say,  
'Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston.'  
(46-49, 53-4)

The speech, it appears at first, is merely designed to emphasise the Queen's wretched state in a hyperbolic manner that will influence Mortimer and his co-conspirators to include her in their plan to overthrow the king. The rejected Queen, deprived of her husband, does not engage in monarchs' customary declarative stance in early modern drama. She is, instead, rendered as an outsider, which is underscored by the fact that her destination, the 'forest', is significant in that the word possibly derives from *foris*, which means 'outside'.<sup>6</sup> Claire Hansen argues that the queen's determination to flee her court in favour of the forest is a 'dramatic and empty threat'; however, while this is most certainly the case, it is perhaps too constrained a view by Hansen. Indeed, as Hansen declares this speech 'is mentioned for no reason other than [to] incite sympathy', it is perhaps worth pointing out that this can be considered in a new light.<sup>7</sup> For example, Isabella's language underscores her rejection through the friendless forest's imagery as it is the most pitiful spectacle that will affect her onstage interlocutors. Unlike Valentine in Shakespeare's early comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1589-92), who wishes to be 'unseen of any, / And to the nightingale's complaining notes / Tune my distresses and record my woes' (5.4.4-6), Isabella, instead, wishes to be spied as she goes 'unto the forest' so she can tune her own distresses to her budding conspirators.

On closer inspection, however, Isabella's speech can be understood as being more than just a plea for sympathy aimed towards either the onstage or theatrical audience, for it also showcases Marlowe's fastening of human suffering with the natural world as well as exposing

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<sup>6</sup> See Anne Barton, *The Shakespearean Forest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Claire Hansen, "Who taught thee this?": Female Agency and Experiential Learning in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward the Second*", *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 60.3 (2013), pp. 157-77, p. 170. Emphasis added.



how a victim's visible signs of suffering provide interlocutors with a unique challenge of interpreting these signs. This, in turn, is often manipulated by Marlowe's characters to highlight how interpersonal selfhoods can be subject to fashioning.<sup>8</sup> Isabella, by claiming her suffering, her 'grief and *baleful* discontent,' must force her to seek a new life in the forest, suggests that suffering has, in a sense, uprooted her social status, if not all forms of distinction. Although she will seek a new location, she does not suggest that the natural environment wholly or immediately ameliorates her pain.<sup>9</sup> The allure of the forest for Isabella bespeaks prevailing cultural ideas that paint the rural world as a safety valve that affords sanctuary wherein one can find time to heal from the toil of human existence. The dehumanising and isolating effects of suffering that suffuse this play are often represented through the capacious, instructive, and liminal depictions of nature's relationship with human suffering. Indeed, the challenges of adequately expressing suffering – from mortal wounds to the banalest scratch – are multiplied by the inherent difficulties on the part of observers to correctly interpret one's language and physical appearance that signify afflicted passions. In the case of Isabella, her suffering presents itself to her interlocutors as definitive evidence for the mounting charges against their sovereign. Not relying upon their assistance, Isabella's presumably sorrowful appearance (as can be signified by tears) is reinforced via her use of natural imagery, namely, the forest, as a contrivance for ultimately communicating her emotional state to her interlocutors.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on how 'in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process' (p.2), see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980; repr. 2005). In contrast, recent scholars, most notably, Nancy Selleck, provide an alternative to Greenblatt's theory by proposing to 'characterize selfhood interpersonally' (p. 18). For more on interpersonal selfhood in early modern literature and culture, see Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); esp. pp. 21-55; Christopher Tilmouth, 'Passion and Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Literature', *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, eds. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 13-32.

<sup>9</sup> As Tom MacFaul has recently pointed out, the relationship between nature and 'physic' can be registered on the etymological level as the word 'physic' 'derives from the Greek word for nature'. See MacFaul, *Shakespeare and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 166.

The intimate relationship between suffering and the natural world can be found even in Isabella's use of language. For instance, when Isabella describes her discontent as 'baleful', the word is derived from the Old English word *bealufull*, which can denote, according to the *OED*, a 'malign, deadly, or noxious influence'. However, it can also be understood as 'full of pain or suffering' in the early modern period. The compound 'baleful discontent' of Isabella provides ambiguity of meaning. On the one hand, if baleful is interpreted through its latter meaning, Isabella is, therefore, determined to overcome her pain and suffering by devoting the rest of her days towards cultivating a self-denying nomadic life in the outskirts of civilization, sequestered away within the confines of the 'forest'.<sup>10</sup> The queen's 'baleful discontent', therefore, implies a 'malign influence' on her part that manifests itself through her duplicitous handling of her husband and Mortimer throughout the play.

Isabella's invocation of the 'forest' as her place of refuge is significant. For a queen to abandon her husband and the realm, driven to the forest, echoes Doctor Faustus's unheeded wish to be turned into 'some brutish beast' before the devil collects his due (*A and B Text*, 5.2.109). Whereas Faustus's pleas are unheeded as he is hurtled inexorably to face his doom alone, Isabella, through her suffering, does not so much *discover* fellowship in her grief, but, perhaps, more accurately, *seeks* to enforce tight interpersonal bonds with the conspirators precisely through her manipulation of established tropes that elicit compassion for the suffering victim. Edward, too, like his wife, engages with similar tropes and natural imagery to explain his suffering, for in his final moments after he is captured, the king compares himself with

... The forest deer, being struck,  
Runs to a herb that closeth up the wounds,  
But when the imperial lion's flesh is gored,

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<sup>10</sup> The forest and the rural landscape, at large, was also understood in the early modern period as harboring its own perils. For example, Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*, explains that the woods are a fit location for the rape of Lavinia to go unnoticed for 'The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull' (2.1.129). References to Shakespeare's works are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016).

He rends and tears it with his wrathful paw,  
And highly scorning that the lowly earth  
Should drink his blood, mounts into the air.  
And so it fares with me, whose dauntless mind  
The ambitious Mortimer would seek to curb,  
And that unnatural Queen, false Isabel,  
That thus hath pent and mewed me in a prison.  
(5.1.9-18)

Edward fastens his suffering onto that of the 'imperial lion' at this moment of the play. However, there is a tension within these lines between Edward's ineffectual reaffirmation of his 'dauntless mind' with the hunted 'forest deer' that is more apt a metaphor to describe the ineffectual king's dwindling status. Therefore, the king undercuts the threat of imprisonment by his insistence that he is not the timid 'deer', but rather the 'imperial lion' in that his suffering is partly due to his similarly self-destructive urge to 'rend and tear' his flesh.

This process of tying self-annihilation to intense suffering reaches a pinnacle when in Act 5, Scene 1, the imprisoned king prepares to remove the crown from his head; he asks Leicester:

But what are kings, when regiment is gone,  
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?  
...  
Whilst I am lodged within this cave of care,  
Where sorrow at my elbow still attends  
To company my heart with sad laments  
That bleeds within me for this strange exchange.  
But tell me, must I now resign the crown,  
To make usurping Mortimer a king?  
(26-7, 31-6)

Here, Edward's material body has been reduced to the transient image of a 'perfect shadow'. Edward's suffering has descended from imagining himself to be like the wounded 'imperial lion' to horrifically imagining his self-identity, his physical presence, as being wholly eradicated, leaving nothing behind but a 'perfect shadow'. This self-annihilation wherein

Edward imagines himself to be nothing more than a ‘shadow’ can be better understood with reference to the theory of the ‘mirror-stage’ as put forth by contemporary French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-81).<sup>11</sup> In brief, according to Lacan, an individual’s identity is fundamentally grounded on the perception of the Other’s perspective. Trying to answer that same puzzle as formulated by Hamlet, Lacan tries to understand what it is ‘[t]o be,’ proposing ‘one has to be recognized by another... This means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, has to be mediated by the gaze of the Other’.<sup>12</sup> Confined and confirmed to die soon, the king is no longer concerned with the Other’s gaze, for, in his view, there is nothing there except a shadow. A shadow of his former self, ‘this strange exchange,’ i.e., the strangeness in the exchange of kingship from the legitimate Edward to the rebelling Mortimer, has exchanged, or, more accurately, extinguished, his self-identity. This is soon undercut, however, by his insistence on his corporeality. ‘[L]odg’d within this cave of care’, the king goes on to provide a blazon of suffering as ‘sorrow at my *elbow* still attends’ while his ‘heart’ is full of ‘sad laments’. As his lamenting progresses, references to his ‘elbow’ and his bleeding ‘heart’ cement the prevailing image that pain in this ‘cave of care’ has gored Edward’s sense of his own body. This figure of goring or dismembering oneself has already been suggested earlier in this speech when the king temporarily muses how ‘when the imperial lion’s flesh is gored, / He rends and tears it with his wrathful paw... And so it fares with me (11-12, 15). Not only does Edward negate his kingly body to the mere physical body, but, crucially, in a more grotesque fashion, the king imagines his material body as susceptible to gruesome forms of torture and dismemberment, which effectively prefigures his violent death. Essentially, seeking to cast himself as a ‘perfect shadow’ has the potential of self-transcendence. For example, one cannot touch nor confine one’s shadow, which in turn grants the imprisoned Edward an escape

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<sup>11</sup> For an excellent overview of Lacan’s life and work, see Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Lacan: In Spite of Everything*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York and London: Verso, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 26.

not just from his cell but also from the deprivation and physically deplorable circumstances he has been subject to since his capture and imprisonment.

Moreover, Isabella's speech is an echo of Gaveston's opening salvo of pleasures near the beginning of the play. Audiences, as they are left wondering what a life lived 'in grief and baleful discontent' would look like, are, conversely, made fully aware of the nocturnal activities that Gaveston devises so he may 'draw the pliant King which way' he pleases. He then leads us through a lyrical tableau of hedonistic homoeroticism when he muses how to manipulate Edward:

Music and poetry is his delight;  
Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,  
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;  
And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,  
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;  
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,  
Shall with their goat-feed dance an antic hay.  
(1.1.52-59)

The forbidden pleasures of homoeroticism are framed and, perhaps, naturalised through abundant natural imagery. Despite the decadent pleasures outlined by Gaveston, there is a hint of danger, or, more specifically, there is a suggestion that these delights will have violent ends. For instance, as Gaveston proceeds with his sensuous descriptions of his Ovidian pages, he ends by lingering on the fate of

One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,  
Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,  
And running in the likeness of a hart  
By yelping hounds pulled down and seem to die.  
(66-69)

As Jonathan Bate observes, the effect of this image of the hunted Actaeon is that it foreshadows the demise of Gaveston 'behind which is an interpretation of Ovidian metamorphosis because

of excess appetite.’<sup>13</sup> In predicting his own (and Edward’s) grisly fate through reference to Ovid’s fables, this play conceptualises human suffering as existing under the natural world’s influence.

Furthermore, later in *Edward II*, when the king’s final loyal followers – Spencer and Baldock – are apprehended by the rebels, Baldock proceeds to cloak their imminent execution as merely paying ‘*nature’s* debt’ when he reassures his friend:

Spencer, I see our souls are fled hence;  
We are deprived the sunshine of our life.  
Make for a new life, man; throw up thy eyes  
And heart and hand to heaven’s immortal throne,  
Pay nature’s debt with cheerful countenance.  
Reduce we all our lessons unto this:  
To die, sweet Spencer, therefore live we all;  
Spencer, all live to die, and rise to fall.  
(4.7.105-12)

Baldock’s acceptance of his fate markedly rejects Faustus’s final attempt at begging near the end of his eponymous play. Baldock’s ‘rise to fall’ conjures similar imagery to Faustus’s desire to be drawn up ‘in a foggy mist,’ as he wishes for his ‘soul to mount and ascend to heaven’ (*Doctor Faustus A Text* 5.2.91, 95). Implicit within Baldock’s insistence on the narrow seams that separate life from death (‘Live we all’, ‘all live to die, and rise to fall’) is evidence of the potential for the human imagination to effectively offer hope for a person that their suffering will soon cease. Baldock’s strategy of minimising the fear and suffering that accompanies the process of death resonates with Michel de Montaigne’s celebration of the infinite potential of the human intellect within ourselves to shield us from nature’s afflictions in his *Essais*. As Montaigne describes in what could be an accurate assessment of Baldock’s condition before his execution, we are always ready to give ‘ourselves over to the vagrant liberty of our mental

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 39. Similarly, Lisa Hopkins’s analysis of this speech argues that: ‘For Gaveston, classical mythology provides both a precedent for and a grammar of homosexuality’. See Lisa Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe: Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 91.

perceptions'.<sup>14</sup> In marked contrast to Tamburlaine's personification that belittles 'Death' as merely his 'slave', an 'ugly monster' that is 'pale and wan for fear,' Baldock's conception of suffering death is portrayed as resembling a kind of exchange between trusting partners (2 *Tamburlaine*, 5.3.67-8).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the paradoxical sensation of joy during suffering is explicit in Baldock's insistence to '[p]ay nature's debt with cheerful countenance'. Extending the logic of Edward's claim that there is 'heaven' through contemplation to its breaking point, Baldock's advice to Spencer to '[m]ake for a new life, man' is without any substance as this thought is declared mere moments before they both are to be executed. However, the potential of the imagination for confusion is mirrored in the disarray of the language. With Edward's leisurely 'trial of philosophy', which leads to his swift capture, Marlowe evinces a scepticism towards the utility and effectiveness of imagination to aid a victim.

This concept that the aggressor suffers alongside their victim is one that Marlowe further explores in his translation of Ovid's *Elegies*. In *Elegia VII* in Book One of Marlowe's translations, we are presented with the suffering inflicted on the speaker, who did [his mistress] harm with his 'mad hand.'<sup>16</sup> In one of the most profound meditations on suffering and guilt, Marlowe's speaker is unable to comprehend how his violent urges have led him to strike his lover:

But though I like a swelling flood was driven,  
 And as a prey unto blind anger given,  
 Was't not enough the fearful wench to chide,  
 Nor thunder in rough threatings' haughty pride,  
 Nor shamefully her coat pull o'er her crown,  
 Which to her waist her girdle still kept down?  
 (43-8)

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<sup>14</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 266.

<sup>15</sup> According to Mark Thornton Burnett, Tamburlaine's personification of Death as his 'slave' and an 'ugly monster', is 'a clue to his [Tamburlaine's] inexorable deterioration.' See Burnett, *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Marlowe, 'All Ovid's *Elegies*', *Complete Poems*, pp. 110-12, l. 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically by line number.

‘She nothing said, pale fear her tongue had tied; / But secretly her looks with checks did trounce me, / Her tears, she silent, guilty did pronounce me’ (20-2). Unlike the nobility’s neutral observers, as they spy Isabella in *Edward II*, or Agydas, he presumes to know why Zenocrate’s ‘unquiet fits’ in *I Tamburlaine*, only the struck lover in these lines can accurately convey her silent suffering through her looks.

In Act 2, Scene 1 of *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1590), we catch a rare glimpse of Barabas trying to delineate how his suffering has forced him to revenge himself on the Maltese authorities, the Christians:

Thus like the sad presaging raven that tolls  
The sick man’s passport in her hollow beak,  
And in the shadow of the silent night  
Doth shake contagion from her sable wings,  
Vexed and tormented runs poor Barabas  
With fatal curses towards these Christians.  
(2.1.1-6)

Emerging within this simile is the sense that the Jewish revenger purges himself of any agency and responsibility for how he is about to proceed. Indeed, ‘contagion’, implying, as it does, infection or plague, suggests that one’s language and imagination are also vulnerable to external influence. Indeed, in this respect, the permeable sense of selfhood that Barabas finds as he wanders in darkness, save only a light he carries according to the stage direction, reinforces the idea that Barabas’s suffering as it shifts into murderous intent, can be partly explained by the miasmatic influence of the night. The night was understood then and now as a harbinger of evil spirits that afflict the Christian’s soul’s purity. Indeed, as Craig Koslofsky observes in his study of ‘nocturnalization’ in early modern culture, from ‘the earliest writings, darkness and the night have borne strongly – though not exclusively – negative associations.’<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Craig Koslofsky, *Evening’s Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 10.



Thus, Marlowe's Jewish protagonist 'dissembles' or conceals his feelings of pain from himself as he opts to engage in a rhetorical exercise rather than any attempt towards self-introspection.

Barabas's figuration of himself as a raven signals a relentless drive on his part to continually reshape his self-identity. James Shapiro's view that the play upholds the 'Jew's capacity to counterfeit effortlessly' is amplified in this scene as we bear witness to Barabas's musings before he encounters Abigail. For, not only is the Jew more than capable of 'counterfeit[ing] effortlessly', but also, crucially, he strives to portray himself in a simile that forges or 'counterfeits' false governing motivations.<sup>18</sup> As he casts himself as the 'sad presaging raven' that must, by its very nature, continue its journey and deliver its message, it follows, then, that according to the logic of Barabas's simile, that he, too, must deliver his vengeance. In contrast to his statements that to suffer from uncertainty and injustice is the impetus to 'Summon thy senses, call thy wits together', and to 'rouse' one's senses, here Barabas's selfhood wanes in tandem with his loosening grip on his sense of agency (1.1.177;1.2.269). The thrust of the simile of the 'sad presaging raven' drives Barabas's response to his suffering. Indeed, his response is somewhat muted in comparison to the claims of other Marlovian protagonists. A diminishing sense of union between character and action is underpinned via the use of hyperbaton in the line 'Vexed and tormented runs poor Barabas'. The 'fatal curses' bespeak how language, or, more specifically, 'dissembling' will be the downfall of Barabas's enemies in this play. The overarching imagery that Barabas's passions are not his own entirely but enmeshed or infected by an external 'contagion' is significant. Despite condemning the folly of his 'silly brethren', Barabas is similarly affected, or rather, infected by the pernicious influence of the 'contagion' that the raven spreads in the 'silent night'. Emphasised here is not the lust for revenge, but rather how the vexations and torments have rendered Barabas a prey to his 'distempered thoughts' (18). In a sense, therefore, Barabas's transformation of his

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<sup>18</sup> James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; repr. 2016), p. 92.

suffering and himself into that of the ‘sad presaging raven’ may indicate Marlowe’s indebtedness to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, as with Arthur Golding’s English translation in 1567, by the 1590s – contemporaneous with Marlowe’s short writing career – according to Susan Wiseman, Ovid’s influence was prominent for as ‘Elizabeth aged, social and political change was anticipated, [and] the 1590s supply a logical starting point for the study of transformation.’<sup>19</sup> As logical as it may be for Marlowe to combine suffering with a wilful act of transformation, it may have been illogical for his contemporary audience to have a Jewish character employ a Christian trope for his imagined transformation.

As Barabas empties his desire for revenge of any personal agency, he instead likens his situation to that of the ‘sad presaging raven’, which is evidence of Stephen Greenblatt’s assertion that Marlowe’s Jewish protagonist ‘defines himself by negating cherished values’.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, this practice of disrupting one’s subjectivity following a traumatic event infects the rest of Barabas’s soliloquy as he ruminates on the source of his ‘despair’: ‘And of my former riches rests no more / But bare remembrance – like a soldier’s scar, / That has no further comfort for his maim’ (9-11).<sup>21</sup> Barabas imagines his ‘fatal curses’ as a force that is as natural and inexorable as the poor raven’s flight while the source of his pain is transformed – from a pedestrian lament for the loss of money – into a dignified ‘soldier’s scar’. He underscores his failures to control not only his pain but also his sense of himself. At this stage of the play, regarding his transformation from victim to revenger, Barabas, like Macbeth, in Catherine

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Wiseman, *Writing Metamorphosis in the English Renaissance: 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980; repr. 2005), p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587-9) evokes a similar idea to how Barabas depicts the revenger as having the influences of the natural elements quell any sense. Hieronimo, upon discovering the corpse of his murdered son, Horatio, poetically casts his suffering to envelop the night’s sky: ‘The night, sad secretary to my moans, / With direful visions wake my vexèd soul’. Similar to how Barabas justifies his revenge against the Christians, Hieronimo’s conversion of his grief at suffering the loss of his son into murderous designs cloaked in revenge stems from his personification of the night as the ‘sad secretary’. The night, recording his ‘moans,’ effectively displaces Hieronimo’s conscience from any internal organ (either the heart or the brain), or, any sense of interiority to, instead, his personification, which affords him the moral freedom to justify murder.

Gimelli Martin's analysis, 'deliberately turns ambiguous signs into predetermined outcomes.'<sup>22</sup> Tellingly, he hastens to conflate his 'bare remembrance' of his loss or 'soldier's scar' with another remembrance that lucidly encapsulates the irrationality of his following crimes:

Now I remember those old woman's words,  
Who in my wealth would tell me winter's tales,  
And speak of spirits and ghosts that glide by night  
About the place where treasure hath been hid:  
And now methinks that I am one of those:  
For whilst I live here lives my soul's sole hope,  
And when I die here shall my spirit walk.  
(24-30)

The loss of Barabas's wealth seeps into and informs his loss of selfhood. Throughout this soliloquy, the consonance of 's' sounds rallies to intensify the secret compact that pervades Barabas's interactions with the audience. Here, Barabas's determination to wreak revenge is temporarily ruptured when his memory initiates uncertainty and speculation.<sup>23</sup> Barabas's pain at his loss of fortune initiates an inner conflict, where his identity gradually diminishes through the hyperactive imagination. The reference to how the 'old woman's words' activate his *unselfing*, as it were, is crucial. For words, they sometimes have adverse effects on Marlowe's protagonists, which are often expressed and felt through physical terms. For instance, it is the beggars' words, not their wretched condition that temporarily arrests Gaveston for '[t]hese words of his move me as much / As of a goose should play the porcupine... / thinking to pierce my breast' (*Edward II*, 1.1.38-40). Contrary to the prevailing view that words have the power, in the words of Thomas Middleton's protagonist Vindice in his *The Revenger's Tragedy*

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, 'The "Reason" of Radical Evil: Shakespeare, Milton, and the Ethical Philosophers', *Studies in Philology*, 113:1 (2016), pp. 163-197, p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> This idea that Barabas's memory remains indelibly etched by his youthful experience of 'winter's tales' 'of spirits and ghosts', does, perhaps, later inspire Shakespeare in his late tragicomedy, *The Winter's Tale* (1611). Here Shakespeare has the young boy, Mamillius deliberate what kind of tale will best please Hermione: 'A sad tale's best for winter', says Mamillius, as he goes on, 'I have one / Of sprites and goblins.' *The Winter's Tale* (2.1.26-7).

(1606), to submerge one within a ‘throng of happy apprehensions’, Marlowe’s characters are, instead, ‘pierced’ or suffer under the yoke of words.<sup>24</sup>

Quelling any sense of agency on Barabas’s part, what we are left with is a grim mimicry of Sir Thomas Browne’s definition of the constitutive parts of the human body.<sup>25</sup> Similar to Browne’s proposition that ‘[w]e are only the amphibious piece between a corporall and spiritual essence’, Barabas’s ‘essence’ is unfixed in that he imagines that he is ‘one of those’ ‘spirits and ghosts that glide by night’.<sup>26</sup> The examples of Barabas ‘*thinking*’ he is one of the ‘spirits and ghosts’, alongside Baldock’s chaotic fusion of earthly existence and the afterlife, as seen in his in the anaphora ‘To die, sweet Spencer, therefore live we all; / Spencer, all live to die, and rise to fall’, implicitly condemns religious commentators’ fear of the chaos that imagination breeds. Thus, this acceptance of death by Barabas and Baldock resonates with Timothy Rosendale’s theory that literary creations are ‘unfettered by metaphysics’ through their ability to imagine the afterlife prior to their deaths.<sup>27</sup> In a similar manner to Barabas’s conceit that he is like the ‘ghosts and spirits’ that flourish in the night, and, closer still, to how Edward imagines the king as nothing more than a ‘perfect shadow’, so, too, does Baldock conceive his new suffering self as shorn from his physical body.

As Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury (1533-55), explains, interpreting one’s fantasy or image-making faculty as a substance or a material entity of some sort is akin to confusing ‘heaven and earth’.<sup>28</sup> As Suparna Roychoudhury points out, Cranmer’s account is frightened of the ‘power of the imagination to make or unmake a coherent cosmos’. Thus, ‘[i]f the material architecture of the universe is “phantas[ied]” erroneously, wrongly construed, then

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (3.5.30). References to Middleton are taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington et al (New York and London: WW Norton, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> For more on Sir Thomas Browne, see the discussion of philosophical approaches to suffering in Chapter 1.

<sup>26</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642; Wing B5166), pp. 64-5.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy Rosendale, *Theology and Agency in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Cranmer, *A defence of the true and catholike doctrine of the sacrament of the body and bloud of our savior Christ* (London, 1550; S.T.C. 6000), p. 275.

everything slides into meaninglessness.’<sup>29</sup> Barabas’s fellowship with the ‘spirits and ghosts that glide by night’, furthermore, sharply recalls for the audience the significance of spirits as we are reminded of the ghost of Machevill that glided by the stage in the play’s Prologue. Indeed, by his very multivalent and enigmatic nature, *The Jew of Malta*’s Machevill encompasses, at the same time, the spirit of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Italian diplomat, politician, and writer of *The Prince* (1513), as well as the play’s chorus as he states that he has returned not to ‘read a lecture here in Britain, / But to present the tragedy of a Jew’ (Prologue, 29-30).<sup>30</sup> The first thing Machevill says is to assure the audience that although ‘the world think Machevill is dead, / Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps’ (Prologue, 1-2). Therefore, this ghost of Machevill has the potential to condition our response to Barabas’s suffering.

Similarly, according to Steven Mullaney’s analysis of Hieronimo in Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587-8), the protagonist of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy, often haunted by a relative’s ghost, effectively effaces the validity of the revenger’s claims to the contrary, as they are but ‘an agent without agency in the play, deluded into thinking otherwise.’<sup>31</sup> In tandem with this view, L. E. Semler, for instance, argues that the ‘Marlovian soliloquy is a type of prison narrative – a voice of selfhood against extinction’.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, in the speech quoted above, at least, it appears that Barabas is temporarily losing the battle against extinction. Therefore, as his kingdom and freedom are diminishing, Edward is told by his captor, Matrevis, that suffering is not a form of extinction, but rather, ‘[m]en are ordained to

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<sup>29</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury, *Phantasmatic Shakespeare: Imagination in the Age of Early Modern Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Machiavelli’s life and legacy, see Corrado Vivanti, *Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); on Machiavelli’s influence on early modern English literature, in particular, see Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. chap. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> L.E. Semler, ‘Doubtful Battle: Marlowe’s Soliloquies’, *Shakespeare and the Soliloquy in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. A.D. Cousins and Daniel Derrin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 43-55, p. 43.

live in misery; / Therefore come. Dalliance dangereth our lives.’<sup>33</sup> To which, the imprisoned king responds:

Friends, whither must unhappy Edward go?  
Will hateful Mortimer appoint no rest?  
Must I be vexèd like the nightly bird  
Whose sight is loathsome to all wingèd fowls?  
(5.3.2-7, 21-4)

Edward’s suffering has played havoc with his perceptual understanding of himself precisely because he is unable to acknowledge his compromised position in relation to the natural world.

### Medical (Mis)diagnoses

Near the beginning of *1 Tamburlaine*, Agydas (a lord accompanying Zenocrate), observing Zenocrate’s sorrowful outward appearance and mindful of her recent abduction under the sway of Tamburlaine and his indomitable army, endeavours to explain his rationale for connecting the external display of emotions with inner wretchedness:

Madam Zenocrate, may I presume  
To know the cause of these unquiet fits  
That work such trouble to your wonted rest?  
’Tis more than pity such a heavenly face  
Should by heart’s sorrow wax so wan and pale,  
When your offensive rape by Tamburlaine  
(Which of your whole displeasures should be most)  
Hath seemed to be digested long ago.  
(1.3.2.1-8)

Agydas’s presumption that Zenocrate’s ‘unquiet fits’ results from Tamburlaine’s ‘offensive rape’ fails to hit the mark, despite his reliance on prevailing early modern medical practice. For

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<sup>33</sup> Here, as Marlowe ‘ordains’ his characters’ words in religious language is evidence of an exception, or, rather, an inversion of Abraham Stoll’s assessment that in this period, it is the ‘theologian [who] must increasingly reach for the tools of poetry.’ See Stoll, *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 2.

example, in his *The Passions of the Minde* (1604), Thomas Wright contends that ‘superiors may learn to conjecture the affections of their subjects’ minds, by a silent speech pronounced in their very countenances.’ To reinforce the validity of this claim, Wright goes on to confidently assume that ‘this point especially may be observed in women, whose passions may easily be discovered’.<sup>34</sup> Zenocrate, however, discredits her would-be physician’s powers of observation by altogether denouncing Agydas’s theory that it is Tamburlaine’s ‘offensive rape’ that is the cause; instead, she insists that it is a ‘farther passion feeds my thoughts’ (13). She declares that, contrary to Agydas’s presumptions, she wishes to ‘live and die *with* Tamburlaine’ (24). While Agydas is only partially successful in correctly deducing Zenocrate is harbouring an internal struggle, his overarching presumption that her ‘heavenly face’ turning ‘so wan and pale’ is a direct corollary to her ‘unquiet fits’ is hugely significant. In its broadest sense, the failure of Agydas’s presumption or, as it were, medical diagnosis of Zenocrate’s ‘unquiet fits’ is indicative of an underlying scepticism that attacks the medical profession at large. Although not exclusive to Marlowe in early modern literature, this denigration of the medical profession is still given special attention by Marlowe.<sup>35</sup> Earlier in the same play, for instance, when Tamburlaine and Techelles are deciding whether to coax or conquer Theridamas when he stands in the way of their enterprise to ‘triumph over all the world’, the Scythian shepherd whispers aside to his lieutenant, ‘Noble and mild this Persian seems to be, / If outward habit judge the man’ (1.1.2.172, 161-2). This arbitrary and unstable intersection between the ‘outward habit’ and internal attributes that Tamburlaine imagines helps an observer ‘judge the man’ is consistently manipulated and tested throughout Marlowe’s oeuvre. As the above

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London, 1604; S.T.C. 26040), p. 29. Originally published in 1601.

<sup>35</sup> This anti-medical bias recurs in early modern literature. Notable examples are Montaigne’s rejection of the ‘bitter taste of their [the physicians’] prescriptions’, Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 866; and John Donne’s observation that although ‘[w]e have the physician... we are [in the final analysis] not the physician’, John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (New York: Vintage, 1999), p. 20. For more on the anti-medical bias in early modern literature, see Suparna Roychoudhury, ‘Forswearing Fever: Medicine, Materialism, and Shakespeare’s Sonnet 147’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2012), pp. 4-25, esp. pp. 15-18.

example demonstrates, it is not, according to Marlowe, entirely without its merits despite its obvious faults and limitations. To advertise its usefulness in cultivating friendships and forming interpersonal relationships is tantamount to revealing how Marlowe is able, to borrow a phrase from David Scott Kastan, ‘to escape the constraints of the orthodoxies, even of the controversies, that defined his age’ in his views concerning the relevance of medical practitioners and methods to evaluate an individual’s internal workings through their outward appearance.<sup>36</sup>

The supposed affinity between appearance and internal turmoil is further examined and stretched to its limits in Marlowe’s poetic treatment of the harmful effects of love in *Hero and Leander*. The narrator’s descriptions of the eponymous couple and their pining for each other straddle between sensations of intense pleasure and insatiable pain. In the second sestiad, after ‘[l]ong dallying with Hero,’ where the lovers kiss and embrace, Leander is forced to return home to his father (2.62).<sup>37</sup> The poetic narrator brings Leander’s erotic pining to life by way of a polyvocal technique wherein the omniscient narrator is often interrupted by the interjections and perspective of Leander as he descants on the suffering he endures as a result of his lover’s absence. This technique of combining an omniscient narrator with that of the (often internal) perspective of a character within the narrative suggests Marlowe’s indebtedness to Virgil. The narrative shift between the speaker and Leander’s thoughts, enmeshed as they are and difficult to separate, could be evidence of Marlowe’s attempt to imitate the Virgilian method as defined by Leah Whittington: ‘the narrator shuttles between subjective and objective points of view, sometimes reporting events from an external perspective, sometimes from a vantage point internal to the characters.’ Whittington clarifies that the ‘Virgilian narrator works to collapse the distinction between the narrator’s representation of the characters and their understanding

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<sup>36</sup> David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> References to *Hero and Leander* are taken from *Marlowe: Complete Poems* and are cited parenthetically by sestiad and line number.



of the events in which they participate.’<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Tamburlaine’s belief in the interpenetrating relationship between that of the hidden emotions and that of the observable body is given credence by the narrator’s all-encompassing maxim, ‘O none but gods have power their love to hide, / Affection by the count’nance is descried’ (2.131-2). To underscore the turmoil that Leander suffers, the narrator employs animalistic imagery to illustrate further the brute, primal, and irresistible force of love:

But love resisted once grows passionate,  
And nothing more than counsel lovers hate.  
For as a hot proud horse highly disdains  
To have his head controlled, but breaks the reins,  
Spits forth the ringled bit, and with his hooves  
Checks the submissive ground: so he that loves,  
The more he is restrained, the worse he fares.  
What is it now, but mad Leander dares?  
(139-46)

By linking Leander’s unruly ‘love’ with the ‘hot proud horse’ that resists constraint, Marlowe gestures towards the concept Plato attributed to Socrates in his *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BCE). Here, the human soul is imagined to be a charioteer of two horses: one calm, the ‘noble horse’, and one recalcitrant horse that is always straining to be set free.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the rampant spread of love throughout Leander’s body corresponds remarkably to the infection of a fever. Akin to parasitic diseases, love, in this case, cannot be ‘resisted’ or cured and instead metastasises throughout Leander’s body or ‘grows passionate’. The segregation of the horse’s body parts, his ‘head controlled’ whereas his ‘hooves / Checks the submissive ground’, indicates the impulse within the early modern medical practice to segregate the parts of the body to facilitate a diagnosis.

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<sup>38</sup> Leah Whittington, ‘Shakespeare’s Virgil’, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, eds Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 98-120, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 61.

The fatalistic diagnosis offered by Marlowe's poetic speaker that 'nothing more than counsel lovers hate' bears a striking resemblance to a similar sentiment as it appears in Shakespeare's Sonnet 147 ('My love is as a fever'). Shakespeare's speaker, infected with the 'sickly appetite' of love, or lust, to be more precise, is torn between conflicting impulses as:

My reason, the physician to my love,  
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,  
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve  
Desire is death, which physic did except.  
(5-8)

Marlowe's Leander does not keep his father's prescriptions and is tormented as a result. The hopelessness of the situation is conveyed through the rhetorical question ('What is it now, but mad Leander dares?') that breaks the omniscience afforded to the narrator. Revoking the earlier statement that Leander's mind can be read 'as an index to a book,' the narrator is left pondering the motives of 'mad Leander'. Juxtaposed alongside Leander's wild passions is an instance of Cynthia Marshall's term 'erotomania' wherein the lovesick lover's language is reduced to unreasonable speech. Likewise, similar to Marshall's example of the shepherd in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599), who cries 'O, Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe!' (2.4.38), so, too, does Leander's language devolve into birdsong as he cries "O Hero, Hero!" thus he cried full oft'.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the bombastic protagonist of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays also suffers a disintegration of language due to his suffering. For instance, in the final scene of 2 *Tamburlaine*, when the titular protagonist (now reduced to an inquisitive patient) asks the physician almost tenderly, '[t]ell me, what think you of my sickness now?', the physician's response is a detailed physiological report, explaining:

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<sup>40</sup> Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 63.

I viewed your urine, and the hypostasis,  
Thick and obscure, doth make your danger great;  
Your veins are full of accidental heat,  
Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried.  
(5.3.81-85)

The physician's sound medical reasoning for explaining Tamburlaine's affliction is tinged with astrological references as the physician prescribes his majesty 'to drink this potion, / Which will abate the fury of your fit / And cause some milder spirits govern you (78-80). Like Macbeth who 'Throw[s] physic to the dogs' (*Macbeth* 5.3.49), Tamburlaine, after being told that he '[c]annot endure by argument of art' (97), curtly replies with a declaration to self-administer his pains: 'Then will I comfort all my vital parts / And live in spite of Death above a day' (100-101). Resolving to forego his doctor's dire predictions, Tamburlaine ultimately finds solace in overcoming his pains through recourse to an inner strength as he proposes to miraculously 'comfort all my vital parts'.

In Act 4, Scene 7 of *Edward II*, immediately before the king's betrayal, he offers a conceit of his suffering as resembling a kind of departure from a previous (wasted) life.

But what is he whom rule and empery  
Have not in life or death made miserable?  
Come, Spencer, come, Baldock, come sit down by me;  
Make trial now of that philosophy  
That in our famous nurseries of arts  
Thou sucked'st from Plato and Aristotle.  
Father, this life contemplative is heaven.  
O, that I might this life in quiet lead!  
But we, alas, are chased; and you, my friends;  
Your lives, and my dishonour they [the rebels] pursue.  
(14-23)

The hunted king's embrace of 'philosophy' as a corrective to the misery of the life of 'rule and empery' creates, to borrow a phrase from Ewan Fernie, 'a *religion* of sorrow.'<sup>41</sup> Edward, it

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<sup>41</sup> Ewan Fernie, "'Another Golgotha'", *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, eds. David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 172-90, p. 186. Emphasis in the original.

appears, then, in his arrival to ‘heaven’ by way of contemplation is similar in manner alongside John Donne’s ‘Artist’ who ‘dares boast that he can bring / Heaven hither’, for Edward speaks of heaven not from religious experience but as a philosophical abstraction.<sup>42</sup>

This ‘trial of philosophy’ does not amount to a dissection of this enterprise at all, but rather showcases the paradoxical joys of lamenting. According to George Puttenham, for example, in his *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589): ‘Lamenting is altogether contrary to rejoicing, every man saith so, and yet is it a peace of joy to be able to lament with ease, and freely to pour forth a man’s inward sorrows and the griefs wherewith his mind is surcharged.’<sup>43</sup> Likewise, in Edward’s estimation, ‘contemplation’ is invoked as the direct path to ‘heaven’. However, earlier within the play, the mind does not offer any succour to counter one’s suffering. For it is Edward himself in Act 1, Scene 4 when he believes Gaveston is to be exiled indefinitely, he laments:

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,  
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops’ hammers,  
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain  
And make me frantic for my Gaveston.  
(311-14)

In these lines, philosophy usurps the therapeutic effects often exclusively attributed to the realm of religion. The trial of philosophy initiated by Edward returns a favourable outcome and endows philosophy with a salvific force that offers a surcease of sorrow for the contemplative individual. The ability of contemplation to offer Edward a respite presents him with the wish ‘O that I might this life in quiet lead’.<sup>44</sup> Edward’s philosophy is figured here similar to Sir

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<sup>42</sup> John Donne, ‘The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World’, *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 391-2.

<sup>43</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy* (London, 1589; S.T.C. 20519.5), p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Montaigne, too, perceives a correspondence between increased suffering and a hyperactive imagination. Unable and, perhaps, unwilling to ‘taste a single pleasure pure and entire,’ Montaigne posits that man is ‘not wretched enough unless by art and study he augments his misery.’ Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, p. 82.

Philip Sidney's formulation in *The Defense of Poesie* (written 1580-83; published 1595).

According to Sidney, philosophy 'often borrow[s from] the masking raiment of *Poesie*':

For even those hard hearted evil men who think virtue a school name... and therefore despise the austere admonitions of the Philosopher... yet will they be content to be delighted, which is all the good, fellow Poet seems to promise; and so steal to see the form of goodness... ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries.<sup>45</sup>

This idea that philosophy serves the victim in the same fashion as medicine is served to the patient is conveyed, despite all of their creative differences, through a shared vocabulary and similar imagery employed by the son of a shoemaker (Marlowe) and a favourite courtier of Queen Elizabeth I herself (Sidney). Sidney's simile that philosophy is a repository of 'goodness' as he connects the qualities of philosophy to 'a medicine of cherries' is, in its essence, recapitulated by Edward in this scene. Here, too, philosophy is imagined to possess physical qualities as it is 'sucked'st from Plato and from Aristotle.' Even more so than Sidney's depiction of philosophy as similar to a 'medicine of cherries', philosophy can be interpreted here as feeding and somehow empowering an essential resource or skill. The abstract ideas and theories of philosophy are translated into the visceral via the word 'sucked'st'.

At the same time, the combination of 'sucked'st' concerning 'famous *nurseries* of arts' interact to evoke a sense of innocence and purity in the face of suffering. The 'nurseries of arts' nourishes Edward with philosophy. Indeed, it is presented like an inter-generational process whereby philosophy is passed down or inherited from Plato and Aristotle's philosophical ancestry. Edward bears his suffering by a return, or, more specifically, a rejection of his former life of 'rule and empery' in favour of the contemplative life. Philosophy's trial restores Edward to perfect nature; the contemplative life is heaven for the king. Edward's trial of profane philosophy chimes with Sir Francis Bacon's hypothesis that 'all trial should be made, whether

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<sup>45</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesie* (London, 1595; S.T.C. 22535), p. 17.

that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things... might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition, or if that may not be, yet reduced to a better condition than that in which it now is'.<sup>46</sup> For Edward to assign 'this life contemplative is heaven' effectively endorses the precepts of early modern physicians that the maladies of one's mind must be countered by other methods than those employed in service of the body. William Bullein, in his *The Government of Health* (1558), for example, reminds us that 'Physic unto an extreme troubled mind... helpeth as little, as to apply a plaster to the breast, or head, of a dead body... The sickness of the body must have medicine, the passions of the mind, must have good counsel.'<sup>47</sup>

For instance, to suck from the sweets of philosophy, suggests the simplicity of animals sucking from nature's offerings. As Corin, the rustic shepherd in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599), puts it in his celebration of bare life in the Forest of Arden, his only sin (if it can be called that) is his 'pride to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck' (3.2.77).<sup>48</sup> As articulated by Sidney, the merits of philosophy are stretched even further in Marlowe's hands. Indeed, this scene, although it may at first appear trivial because the king and his compatriots have time to mull over and 'make trial' of philosophy while they are being hunted, can also be evidence of Matthew Greenfield's proposition that Marlowe consistently offers us 'a serious philosophical challenge to our assumptions about the structure of the self'.<sup>49</sup> Not only does philosophy offer a respite from suffering for Edward, but it also envelops his disguised compatriots in exile, Spencer Junior and Baldock, into a false sense of security that transgresses the boundaries of earthly existence. Following the king's call to put philosophy on trial, the stage directions

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<sup>46</sup> Sir Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding et al, 14 vols. (London: Longman, 1857-74), 8:17.

<sup>47</sup> William Bullein, *The Government of Health* (London, 1558; S.T.C. 4039), p. 64.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. The servant Tranio's advice to his master, Lucentio, on the best methods for self-advancement in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, 'To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy' for 'No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en' (1.1.28,40).

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Greenfield, 'Christopher Marlowe's Wound Knowledge', *PMLA* 119:2 (2004) pp. 233-246, p. 242.

suggest that it may be appropriate for the actors to sit on the floor together. As the Abbot joins them, the stage direction reads Edward ‘rests his head in the Abbot’s lap’ (4.7.40.SD). At the same time, in this leisurely (and possibly erotic) position, Edward invites a form of collective mourning and strikes a pose appropriated from the biblical rhetoric of *Lamentations*.<sup>50</sup> Resting his head on the lap of the Abbot, Edward practically mimics the iconic posture of the lamenter, as framed in the French Protestant theologian Daniel Tossanus’s version of *The Lamentations* (1587), where the suffering victim is ‘patiently to hang down the head and to be humbled in silence without reply.’<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Barabas’s representation of his pain is achieved through a pattern of self-negation through a supernatural reversal of the natural world’s processes. Thus, it is the darkness or ‘eternal night’ that Barabas and others aspire to when engulfed in pain. For in the darkness, all sign of human interference is wiped out. The ‘o’erhanging firmament’ is what provides what little light one can expect in the night.<sup>52</sup> While Barabas longs for ‘eternal night’, which is essentially a form of natural excess in that the night usurps the day, Faustus, by contrast, wishes to alleviate his suffering through his desire to remind himself of the sense of order and stability that exists in the natural world. For example, in the 1604 version of *Doctor Faustus*, after the demonic magician is finished performing miraculous tasks before the Emperor, Mephisopheles, hell’s spirit sent to observe and distract Faustus, at the conjurer’s request to ‘make haste / To Wittenberg’, reasonably enquires whether he will ‘go on horseback or on foot?’ In response, Faustus decides, ‘Nay, till I am past this fair and pleasant green, I’ll walk on foot’ (4.1.105-8). Ostensibly, Faustus’s response appears unremarkable and mundane

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<sup>50</sup> Similarly, on the influence of *Lamentations* on Shakespeare and early modern literary culture, see Lynne Magnusson, ‘Shakespearean Tragedy and the Language of Lament’, *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, eds. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 120-134; Adrian Streete, ‘*Titus Andronicus* and the Rhetoric of Lamentation’, *The Bible on the Shakespearean Stage: Cultures of Interpretation in Reformation England*, eds. Thomas Fulton and Kristen Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 121-39.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Tossanus, *The Lamentations and holy mournings of the Prophet Jeremiah*, trans. Thomas Stocker (London, 1587; S.T.C. 2779.5), p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> *Hamlet* (2.2.1395).

at best. However, this line is virtually unique throughout Marlowe's dramatic canon. Nowhere else is it possible to witness a Marlovian character make such a tender and simple request to walk on 'fair and pleasant green'.<sup>53</sup>

In a play saturated with stage directions that indicate demons, spirits, and, often, fireworks, it is somewhat perverse to suddenly inject imagery that best befits Marlowe's pastoral verse rather than his most demonic play. His desire for the 'fair and pleasant green' can be better understood with reference to the concept of the 'encounter with the real' as formulated by Lacan.<sup>54</sup> The use of space, specifically, the 'fair and pleasant green' in Faustus's case, chimes with Lacan's idea that the Real signifies one's limits to encountering the Truth of existence. As much as his rejection of the books in his study at the beginning of this play, then, the boundary between the 'fair and pleasant green' and what is not green – the boundary between the natural and non-natural worlds – represents the suffering that Faustus must face as he cannot hope to gain immunity from the afflictions of the earth. Faustus's limited time on the 'fair and pleasant green' reflects his limited hold on his powers and life. Similar to how Faustus cannot hold onto Helen of Troy despite his magical powers and boundless knowledge, he 'can never quite capture and hold any ultimate object of desire'.<sup>55</sup>

'[S]ufferance breeds ease,' Barabas chides Abigail for her to cease her excessive 'exclamations' for the injustice they have suffered under the Maltese authorities (1.2.242). Thus, it appears that for a moment, at least, Barabas is stoically resolved to suffer fortune's slings and arrows. Moreover, earlier in the same scene, immediately after Barabas is stripped of his fortune by the authorities, he turns his attention not to his afflictors but instead chastises the complacency of his fellow Jews:

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<sup>53</sup> The term 'Marlovian overreacher' is, of course, indebted to the seminal study Harry Levin, *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature*, p. 327.



O silly brethren, born to see this day!  
Why stand you thus unmoved with my laments?  
Why weep you not to think upon my wrongs?  
Why pine not I, and die in this distress?  
(173-6)

Language, it seems, initially fails to offer any relief for Barabas. His suffering does not render him mute, for he ‘rouse[s] his senses’ and his eloquence to deliver a speech that will affect his interlocutors. Despite his pleas for solidarity from his Jewish ‘brethren,’ however, Barabas is unconcerned with seeking partners in his grief for his initial contempt of his ‘*silly* brethren’. This unconcern soon evolves to his utter disdain for the ‘simplicity of these base slaves’ in his first soliloquy to the audience as the Jews depart. Moreover, at the same time, this exchange between Barabas and his fellow Jews is highly significant in showcasing Marlowe’s experiments with the potential of language to intensify suffering at the cost of the victim’s sense of selfhood.

In this exaggerated performance within the play for his offstage as well as the onstage audience, the poetic language binds Barabas’s sudden fall into poverty with a dissolving sense of humanity. The use of both anaphora (‘Why’... ‘Why’... ‘Why’) and *erotesis* neatly encapsulate the feelings confusion and hopelessness that paralyzes a victim immediately after suffering a significant loss. Laments have been reduced to airy nothings. Regarding the potential performing this scene, to prolong the enunciation of each ‘Why’ can simultaneously produce a hyperbolic style that is fitting with Barabas’s ‘dissembling’ nature, and yet still, these laments can also evince fellow suffering from the onstage Jews, and even potentially the offstage audience. This ‘lament’ culminates in a desire for self-annihilation similar to Faustus’s pleas to be drawn up ‘in a foggy mist’, as he ‘henceforth wish[es] for an eternal night, / That clouds of darkness may enclose my flesh, / And hide these extreme sorrows from mine eyes’

(196-8). This strikingly dark wish for self-destruction ('eternal night') as the only recourse for his suffering chimes with Edward's lament as he is forced to resign his crown.

Here, too, the King, immediately after he yields the crown, calls upon an anthropomorphised death to '[c]ome... and with thy fingers close my eyes, / Or if I live, let me forget myself' (5.1.110-11). Indeed, one is reminded of Faustus's desperate final plea before his time is up for himself to be drawn up 'like a foggy mist... So that my soul may but ascend to heaven / But let my soul mount, and ascend to heaven' (*A Text* 5.2.90,95; *B Text* 5.2.167,171). Henceforth, what is mutually shared by these protagonists is a shared attempt to represent how thinking on the natural world when one is suffering serves to displace an individual's sense of responsibility for their current predicament. Faustus's wish for the natural world's 'fair and pleasant green' is in stark contrast to Barabas's lust for 'eternal night'. For the night in the early modern poetic imagination is nature's way of showcasing the ugly or sinister in nature. Thus, it is the darkness or 'eternal night' that Barabas and others aspire to when engulfed in pain. For example, Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet 98 in his *Astrophil and Stella* collection (composed 1580s; published posthumously 1591), comments on how 'the black horrors of the silent night / Paint woe's black face so lively to my sight'.<sup>56</sup> Within Sidney's allusion to how it is the night's 'horrors' that create 'woe's black face so *lively* to my sight', there is a rampant insistence on blackness to suggest vice or ugliness. In his Sonnet beginning 'In Night when colors all to black are cast' (1633), Fulke Greville (friend and disciple of Sidney's) follows the same pattern. When in darkness, one's 'eye... to inward senses placed... And from this nothing seen, tells news of devils, / Which but expressions be of inward evils.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 206.

<sup>57</sup> Fulke Greville, 'Sonnet C ['In Night when colours all to black are cast'] (London, 1633; S.T.C. 12361), pp. 1068-9. Cf. The relationship between darkness and melancholy thoughts in Robert Burton's poetic 'Abstract' to his *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) as discussed in Chapter 1.

It is the night's sky that helps to produce in the speaker's imagination a fitting site to aim his laments.

Similarly, in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), he advises his readers that lament's rhetorical technique is a 'very necessary device of the poet'. As Puttenham explains it, it is through the act of lamenting that the speaker can play 'the physician, and not only by applying a medicine to the ordinary sickness of mankind but by making the very grief itself (in part) cure of the disease.'<sup>58</sup> All the actions and words of a lamenter which Barabas might play, but he is unskilled in discerning the cause of his daughter Abigail's afflictions. Indeed, in a scene reminiscent of Mortimer's questioning of Isabella when she heads for the forest, as discussed at the start of this chapter, Barabas must also enquire:

But whiter wends my beauteous Abigail?  
O what has made my lovely daughter sad?  
What, woman, moan not for a little loss:  
Thy father has enough in store for thee.  
(228-31)

At the level of syntax, Barabas's insistence for Abigail to 'moan not for a little loss: / Thy father has enough in store for thee' can be interpreted in practical terms signifying that he has secret money 'in store'. However, at the same time, it may also be indicative that the father does not wish his daughter to 'moan' for him as he has enough feelings of 'loss' for them both. Although Barabas's wishes for 'eternal night' may be feigned, the genuine emotional distress that afflicts him after Abigail informs him that the authorities have 'seized upon thy house and wares' leads him to unleash a damning apostrophe aimed at the 'luckless stars':

Think me so mad I will hang myself,  
That I may vanish o'er the earth in air,  
And leave no memory that e'er I was?  
No, I will live; nor loath I this my life:  
And since you leave me in the ocean thus  
To sink or swim, and put me to my shifts,

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<sup>58</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 190-296, p. 206.

I'll rouse my senses, and awake myself.  
(253, 262, 265-71)

For Barabas, his descent into poverty cannot but provoke fears that not only will he be tempted towards suicide ('hang myself'), but also, catastrophically, he will leave no imprint as he 'may vanish' and 'leave no memory that e'er I was'. To utter this in the presence of his daughter is startling. Despite his claim that he is 'framed of finer mould than common men,' Barabas's metaphoric image that he is stranded 'in the ocean' conveys the sense that he, like all humans, must choose whether to 'sink or swim' (243). As Suparna Roychoudhury points out in her study of the oceanic metaphor in early modern literature, the '[k]ey to the efficacy of the ocean as a figure for the troubled mind seems to be the specifically kinetic quality of perturbation... the feeling, as [Thomas] Walkington put it, of being "[t]ost to and fro."<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Barabas's rhetorical question to his Jews ('Why stand you thus unmoved with my laments?') signifies a significant problem in early modern understandings of pain that Marlowe obsessively exploits. The power of emotion feigned on stage to produce genuine emotions within audience members is debated by pro- and anti-theatricalists in this period. Perhaps most (in)famously, Stephen Gosson complains in exemplary fashion within his *Plays confuted in five actions* (1582) that:

The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps, and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude.<sup>60</sup>

The Second Jew, for instance, appears to confirm Gosson's suspicions that the 'beholding of troubles' induces 'womanish weeping' when he urges his companion for them to leave Barabas in his 'ireful mood,' for 'tis a misery / To see a man in such affliction' (212, 214-5). This

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<sup>59</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury, 'Mental Tempests, Seas of Trouble: The Perturbations of Shakespeare's *Pericles*', *ELH*, 82.4 (2015), pp. 1013-39, p. 1019.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Gosson, *Plays confuted in five actions* (London, 1582; S.T.C. 12095), p. 27.

contagious transmission of ‘misery’ from Barabas to his fellow Jews is indicative of Marlowe’s parodying of the anti-theatricalists’ rhetoric such as that espoused by Gosson in the example above where he detests the power of the theatre to present ‘miserable slaughters’, which, in turn, ‘drive us to immoderate sorrow’. Furthermore, the disparity between Barabas’s laments of linguistic incapacity and his following lines of eloquence suggests that when it comes to assuaging one’s turmoil, the collapse between an individual and the natural world is vital for the nature of their suffering to reveal itself.

### Conclusion

In his ongoing interrogations into responses to suffering, Marlowe continually acknowledges two strategies, or, perhaps more accurately, two reactions to suffering prevalent in early modern culture. Thus, the examples of suffering in Marlowe’s works ranging from Tamburlaine’s victims to Leander, Edward, and Isabella’s invocation of the natural environment and animals to make sense of their human afflictions, testify to Marlowe’s engagement with contemporary debates on whether pain can be authentically expressed through language. Isabella’s manipulations of natural tropes in *Edward II* and Agydas’s presumption of Zenocrate’s ‘unquiet fits’ in *I Tamburlaine* showcase the inherent tensions of deciphering the relationship (if, indeed, there is one) between the outer and inner realms of the body and spirit. Marlowe’s complication, rather than outright condemnation of the medical procedure of diagnosing internal suffering from outward appearances as explored in *I Tamburlaine* and *Hero and Leander*, is evidence of his scepticism towards the supposed analgesic effects of a philosophical approach to remedy internal turmoil.

The examples of the relationship between suffering and the natural world in Marlowe’s works examined here do not revoke traditional Christian views that salvation from or cessation

of pain can be achieved by directing one's thoughts to God. Instead, this chapter suggests that Marlowe redirects these Christian solutions to the problem of pain by way of the natural world. Furthermore, the complete breakdown of language because of suffering testifies that Marlowe was deeply sceptical towards the potential for language to offer any succour for the victim. The blunt dismissals of Zenocrate to her husband's ornate descriptions of her ascension to heaven is evidence of Marlowe's acute self-introspection and suspicion that the language of the sublime can often be trumped when faced with the blunt reality (and, often indignity) of extreme agony. Marlowe encourages us to believe that there is a sanctuary in the attempt to fasten onto the natural world as a mechanism to understand their plight from his representation of suffering. It is not the preserve of the natural world to offer this solution to pain, and yet, within Marlowe's works, it is the natural world and its phenomena that enables the suffering individual to hone in on the source and help explain to themselves, and, by extension, us (the reader), the effects of their ordeals.

### Chapter 3

#### **‘So we ourselves miraculously destroy’: John Donne and the Self-Destructive Imagination**

Is he a world to himself only therefore, that he hath enough in himself, not only to destroy and execute himself, but to presage that execution upon himself... as if he would make a *fire* the more vehement by sprinkling water upon the coals... lest the *fever* alone should not destroy fast enough... except we joined an artificial sickness of our own melancholy, to our natural, our *unnatural fever*.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores the potential of imagination’s self-destruction as elaborated by John Donne (1572-1631) in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) in the chapter’s epigraph above. Indeed, it is precisely imagination’s ‘fiery’ qualities that lends itself to Donne’s obsession with imagination’s ability to ‘burn’ the person doing the imagining.<sup>2</sup> According to Donne, despite his claims to be a ‘world to himself’, man is nevertheless predisposed with some innate affliction to perpetually ‘execute himself’ with harmful (and imaginary) ‘presage[s]’ and ‘sad apprehensions’.<sup>3</sup> In Donne’s view, the ‘fiery’ imagination can result in the individual suffering from an ‘unnatural fever’. From his witty courting sonnets as youthful and lascivious ‘Jack’ to his appointment as Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral later in life, Donne’s continual reflections on the punishments human beings wreak upon themselves is a motivational drive throughout this poet’s output.

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<sup>1</sup> John Donne, ‘Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions’ *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 333-350, p. 334. Emphases added.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation used for the chapter’s title is taken from John Donne’s elegy, ‘Epitaph on Himself’, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 233, l. 17. Subsequent references to Donne’s poetry are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line number.

<sup>3</sup> John Donne, ‘Devotions’, p. 334.

Nevertheless, as Joseph Campana argues, ‘surprisingly little work approaches directly his [that is, Donne’s] entanglement’ with the problem of pain.<sup>4</sup> This chapter attends to Donne’s unique understanding of suffering through his incendiary imagination to pick up where Campana has left off. It is incendiary in the sense that, as discussed below, Donne instils his writings with a continual obsession that yoke imagination with one of the natural elements: fire.

This chapter reads Donne’s works as a unique site of interest to the extent that it approaches imaginative suffering as hailing from the inherent (pyromaniac) nature of the imagination itself. While ‘pyromaniac’ refers to an individual with a mental disorder that makes them prone to starting fires, Donne shifts the burden of responsibility and the adverse effects inwards from the pyromaniac creating fires to the internal fire of the imagination. In Donne’s hands, the imagination is best understood as a fiery internal substance has the potential to break out and cause the individual to suffer from burning fevers. What follows is an attempt to showcase how Donne’s consciously represents and reflects upon the ‘fiery’ imagination in his writings.

The first section of this chapter shows how Donne’s attitude towards the imagination – with sustained analysis of genres as varied as poetry, prose, and religious sermons – amounts to a distinctly cautious anxiety that the fire of one’s mind can actively grow and burn, so to speak, not only the individual’s mind but the body as well. The perennially ingrained fusion of fire with the creative mind is explored through the lens of the story of Prometheus’s theft of the fire – that is, supreme/forbidden knowledge – from the mythological gods and bestowing it upon humankind. Indeed, Prometheus’s crime in kindling the human imagination results in his endless torment, which is interpreted as instilling a tradition wherein fire is employed as a

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Campana, ‘Pain’, *John Donne in Context*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 196-203, p. 196.



trope that is understood to balance between meaning human greatness on the one hand and great suffering on the other. Writing against this background, Donne forges a unique perspective on the shared untameable qualities between the suffering imagination and fire. Through these different characterisations of the soul's relationship to fire, Donne invests this trope with a distinctive force to reveal the imagination's inherent painful qualities. Donne's poetic re-fashioning of the relationship between the soul and fire must be parsed alongside the dread of fire that pervaded England towards the turn of the seventeenth century. Hence, this section reveals that by the time when Donne began to write at the turn of the seventeenth century, fire (alongside its association with the horrible fate of Prometheus) can be interpreted as hailing from both heaven and hell. In other words, fire can be understood as the path towards pleasure as well as pain.<sup>5</sup>

The second section turns to examine the epithet 'giddy' as it was understood concerning Donne's examination of the ability of the mind's suffering to intertwine with the body. As it shall illustrate, to be 'giddy' in this period does not coalesce with contemporary meanings of exhilaration. 'Giddiness' is better understood as denoting a vague, transitive condition that straddles the boundaries between the physical and inner domains. Therefore, it was possible to describe someone as rejoicing in giddiness while one could be said to suffer from a bout of giddiness. Concurrently, Donne productively yokes the universal fear of the plague in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England with the arbitrary afflictions that the imagination can suddenly and self-destructively wreak upon one's mind and body. In other words, Donne is unique in his peculiar fashioning of a shared suspicion that the creative imagination in general, and the poetic imagination in particular, are the source not only of

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ismini Pells, 'fear of fire was "a very real constant factor" in early modern settlements.' The most famous example is, of course, the Great Fire of London in 1666. See Pells, 'Soliciting Sympathy: The Search for Psychological Trauma in Petitions from Seventeenth-Century Soldiers', in *Early Modern Trauma: Europe and the Atlantic World*, eds Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), pp. 129-150, p. 141.

sublime literary utterance but also of the imagination's capacity to engulf the individual with (in Donne's terms) intuitive 'pre-apprehensions and presages' of future torments.<sup>6</sup> Broadening the scope of Donne's writings on the fever, it will be argued in this section that what differentiates Donne's expression of the adverse effects of the imagination (for he is not alone in that regard) is his attack and disdain for the profession with which he dabbled in early life and for which he is now mainly remembered: writing poetry.

Rather than uphold the poet's imagination as superior in any way, what emerges from Donne's writings is an overwhelming sense that the creative imagination is akin to a fever's symptoms. Although a critical feature of Donne's and his coterie of metaphysical poets at this time was to yoke seemingly incongruous concepts together – a famous case in point being the squashing of a flea with the death of Christ – here, instead, the focus will be Donne's yoking of the fiery imagination with the feverish and, therefore, giddy body. This chapter ultimately shows how Donne expands our understanding of the imagination to disclose how the supposedly sublime workings of the mind can be converted into a hellish place of enduring torments.

### **Prometheus's Fate: Fire as a Trope for Imagination**

The intimate connection of fire with human creativity (the imagination) has been kindled and rekindled within Western culture since the beginnings of philosophy in classical Greece and Rome. Despite the innumerable attempts to locate the human imagination – ranging from the likely candidates of the heart or brain on the one hand, or an ethereal presence, on the other –

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<sup>6</sup> John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (London, 1624; S.T.C. 7033a), p. 7. References to the *Devotions* will follow this edition unless otherwise stated.

there is an emerging sense that such attempts usually lead to discontent.<sup>7</sup> To take but one example of this discontent with the search for the imagination, Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) laments that if one tries to pinpoint the source of our ‘vital spirits,’ it must be acknowledged that it ‘exceedeth’ our abilities. Therefore, according to Raleigh, the soul ‘is a substance that by *imagination* of any bodily thing cannot be comprehended’.<sup>8</sup> As Rocío G. Sumillera has demonstrated, Raleigh was just one among countless voices in the early modern debate concerning the possibility of ascribing the location of the imagination’s powers to an internal bodily organ such as the brain or heart.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the imagination was understood to originate either from two sources (often, but not exclusively, working in unison): divine intervention or melancholic bile present in the body.<sup>10</sup>

Long before Raleigh lamented the slipperiness – that is, the abject failure – that unfolds when comparing the imagination to the body’s organs, it was the various affordances of the metaphorical comparison of the imaginative faculties with fire which flourished in antiquity. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), for instance, in his comprehensive study *Natural History* (c. 77-79 AD), dedicates an entire chapter to detailing the ‘Marvellous Facts Connected with Fire’. Pliny, without any hint of irony or qualification, declares:

Having now described all the creations of human ingenuity, reproductions, in fact, of Nature by the agency of art, it cannot but recur to us, with a feeling of admiration, that

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<sup>7</sup> As Abraham Stoll puts it in his analysis of early moderns’ representations of the human conscience, which is equally relevant here: ‘The [imaginative] faculty is the center of attention, but simultaneously resistant to that attention, slipping away while making a show of slipping away’. See Stoll, *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, ‘Treatise of the Soul’, *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh*, eds. William Oldys and Thomas Birch, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1829), VIII, p. 578. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> See Rocío G. Sumillera, ‘From Inspiration to Imagination: The Physiology of Poetry in Early Modernity’, *Parergon*, 33.3 (2016), pp. 17-42.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the early modern attempts to locate the imagination within the head or heart, respectively, see Lianne Habinek, Lianne Habinek, ‘Untying the “Subtle Knot”: Anatomical Metaphor and the Case of the *rete mirabile*’, *Configurations*, 20.3 (2012), pp. 239-77; William W.E. Slights, *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For a direct examination of the head/heart debate, see Suparna Roychoudhury, ‘Anatomies of Imagination in Shakespeare’s Sonnets’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 54.1 (2014), pp. 105-24.

there is hardly any process which is not perfected through the intervention of fire.<sup>11</sup>

Pliny's conflation of 'human ingenuity' with the 'intervention of fire' is channelled through the 'agency' afforded through the medium of 'art'. The unambiguous celebration ('feeling of admiration' in Pliny's words) reveals a deep-seated fascination with the idea that the tenor of imagination and, by extension, art can be cognitively grasped through the metaphorical vehicle of fire. 'Anything emanating heat,' according to Stephen J. Pyne, in his analysis of the metaphoric internal fire in Western culture, 'light or change (or for humans, passion) could be subsumed under the doctrine of a universal fire.'<sup>12</sup> Hence, analogies that likened fire to the imagination implicitly affirm that the fire within the human mind transforms the (cold) words into the (heat) of literature. These ideas, in turn, are passed down to writers of the English Renaissance from their classical predecessors.

Nevertheless, despite the benefits of fire, there is, simultaneously, an opposing feeling of fear *contra* Pliny when it comes to the subsuming power of fire. Seeking a more definite sense as to why the fire of the mind became accompanied by feelings of fear and pain, it is helpful to briefly relate Prometheus's mythological story. Prometheus's fate aids an understanding as to why Donne concluded that the imagination and its potential effects should be met with a degree of dread.

The story of Prometheus (Greek for 'fore-thought') is one of eternal resurrection, both in terms of the protagonist's fate and the myth's endurance throughout the ages. To strip the myth to its essentials: Prometheus, a Titan, and a trickster steals fire (some form of forbidden knowledge, similar in quality and of consequence as the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden) from the Gods and delivers it to humankind. Zeus has Prometheus chained to a cliff in the

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<sup>11</sup> Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley, 6 vols (London: FQ Legacy Publishing, 1857), VI, p. 383.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Pyne, 'Fire in the Mind: Changing Understandings of Fire in Western Civilization', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 371 (2016), pp. 1-8, p. 4.

Caucasus mountains where an eagle eats his liver for this revolt. Crucially, this punishment is eternal, for every night, Prometheus's liver regrows, and he is forced to suffer this fate for the rest of time. As Johan Fornäs summarises, Prometheus is usually received as a warning:

[He is] a 'trickster' who mixes good and bad, standing halfway between gods and men. He has been seen as a benefactor of human civilisation... On the other hand, he was responsible for an irreversible rift between mankind and [the] gods[.]<sup>13</sup>

Like fire itself, Prometheus is a mixture of 'good and bad'. Impossible to categorise definitively as he is 'halfway between gods and men', so, too, is it virtually impossible to ascribe stable features to fire, for it runs like liquid as it spreads and turns to gas as it flickers out. Due to its stunning combination of distinctive traits – mobility, access to intimacy via its ability to warm and keep the human alive, hidden knowledge, and, ultimately, destruction – fire serves as a conceptual tool that sweeps through the beneficial and harmful side-effects of the imagination.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, Prometheus's gift of fire to humanity can also signify a curse in that it initiates a kind of 'Fall of Man'. What is of particular interest here in the case of Prometheus's punishment is the gruesome imagery of the eagle devouring the trickster's liver, which in turn regrows and is again devoured in an eternal process. While this image is both vivid and graphic, the punishment's logic is perhaps even more arresting. The punishment for transgression exceeds itself to the extent that the gift of knowledge manifests in the body's suffering – in Prometheus's case, his liver.

Similarly, Donne's scepticism of the supposed benefits of imagination's fire can be found in his elegant condemnation of philosophy in his otherwise unphilosophically inclined sonnet 'A Fever' (posthumously published in 1633's *Songs and Sonnets*). As Donne's speaker

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<sup>13</sup> Johan Fornäs, *Signifying Europe* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that apart from the capability for destruction, the flea – as a conceptual tool for comparing the machinations of diminutive insects with the invisible work of atoms – is markedly similar with the purchase of metaphorically tethering fire with imagination. See Wendy Beth Hyman, 'Seeing the Invisible under the Microscope: Natural Philosophy and John Donne's Flea', *Philological Quarterly*, 98.1- & 2 (2019), pp. 157-180, p. 160.

frets that he ‘shall hate / All women so, when thou art gone,’ he quite unexpectedly shifts his attention to the vacuous ramblings of contemporary philosophers:

Oh wrangling schools, that search what fire  
Shall burn this world, had none the wit  
Unto this knowledge to aspire,  
That this her fever might be it?  
(13-16)

Here, the speaker readily condemns the abstract philosophising of contemporary theologians as a bunch of ‘wrangling schools’ that pointlessly quibble amongst themselves as they ‘search [argue] what fire / Shall burn this world’. In anticipation of Donne’s *Anniversary* poems (1611-12), the framing analogy of ‘A Fever’ translates a woman’s loss into a catastrophic apocalypse of cosmological proportions. The exclamation ‘Oh’ that begins this stanza indicates the all-encompassing loss that the poem’s addressee represents. However, despite the suggestion that the subject’s fever is the ‘fire’ that will end the world, there is an underlying strain between the poem’s diction and content. For example, after the heightened rhetoric of the exclamatory ‘Oh’ (originally ‘O’ in Donne’s spelling), the diction soon descends to everyday language. ‘[W]rangling schools’ diminishes the significance, if any, that is offered by the world’s scholars/theologians. They are nothing but fighting school(boy)s. Specifically, they are naïve ‘schools’ who try to search the ontology of suffering (‘what fire / Shall burn this world?’). To do so, the speaker suggests, is a fool’s errand.<sup>15</sup>

Simultaneously, the speaker distils the world’s end through a single but all-consuming ‘fire’. The notion that a woman’s dying moments send the speaker into a frenzy as he contemplates the end of all times is powerfully conveyed through the final line (‘That this her fever might be it?’). For the end of the world to be packed in the single word ‘it’ is outrageous; the useless ‘wrangling’ of the different ‘schools’ of thought offsets the outsized consequences

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<sup>15</sup> Compare Donne’s warning in his *Devotions* where he claims that a fever ‘doth not only melt [man] but... reduce him to Atoms... And how quickly? Sooner than thou canst receive an answer, sooner than thou canst conceive the question’ (*Devotions*, pp. 235-6).

embedded in the ability of 'it' to signify the end of days. To complete the stanza and the thought, it is as if the speaker does so with a shrug. The fire that self-consumes the poem's subject is thus applicable to the speaker's thoughts in that they too burn out. Indeed, the speaker openly admits that his imagination is incapable of extending one's life for he concedes that his thought experiments cannot prolong the woman's life ('my mind, seizing thee, / Though it in thee cannot perséver' (ll. 25-6)). The speaker's thoughts on the woman and the woman herself cannot 'perséver' or survive. In other words, the connection between the act of thinking with self-destruction, in the same vein as Prometheus, is concomitant with Donne's idiosyncratic speculations and experiments with the adverse and painful effects of the imagination in his poetry and sermons.

For example, in the poem beginning, 'I am a little world made cunningly / Of elements,' in Donne's *Divine Meditations*, the speaker follows a similar pattern of suffusing the process of suffering with the element of fire as seen in 'A Fever'. As Donne's speaker of 'I am a little world' laments in the final lines:

alas the fire  
Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,  
And made it [the world] fouler; let their flames retire,  
And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal  
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.  
(8, 10-14)

Donne's speaker conjoins the 'fire' with lust and envy as the final step in his suffering. Crucially, as he imagines himself to be engulfed in imaginary flames, they internalise rather than resist their pain in both cases. The fire of the body's sins is placed on an equal footing with God's 'fiery zeal'. For Donne's speaker, acceptance of his suffering is essential for healing. However, this wise passivity in the face of suffering is not always the case in Donne's works. In an early verse letter 'To Mr. T.W.', Donne has his speaker narcissistically indulging

in his fantasy to imitate the poem's subject: 'All hail, sweet poet, more full of more strong fire, / Than hath or shall enkindle any spirit' (1-2). The yoking of imaginative (in this case, the yoking of poetic) insight with a kind of divine fire is, perhaps, the most ubiquitous descriptor of creative genius that long precedes and outlives Donne's use of this trope in his verse letter written sometime around 1592.<sup>16</sup>

As Yasmin Haskell puts it, 'the early modern period was an age, perhaps *the* age, of the imagination.'<sup>17</sup> Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-86) *The Defence of Poesy* (written c. 1580; published posthumously in 1595) – the statement *par excellence* of imagination's champions in this period and embodiment of Haskell's argument – celebrates (almost to the point of deifying) the supreme power and freedom that the poet's mind possesses.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in opposition to the 'narrow warrant' that is afforded by the natural world, the poet, Sidney tells us, can 'grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature'.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was not uncommon for early modern poets to lavish praise upon the imagination's ability to offer one a retreat from the world's woes. Sir Edward Dyer's (1543-1607) lyric 'My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is' (1588) is but one of innumerable Sidneyian celebrations of the imagination in this period. The reader is assured that despite, or, partly because, of his lack of earthly status, the speaker is free to retreat to the

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<sup>16</sup> Donne explicitly makes the connection between poetry ('verse') and religion in his 'Sappho to Philaenis' where the speaker begins with the rhetorical question: 'Where is that holy fire, which verse is said / To have?' (1-2).

<sup>17</sup> Yasmin Haskell, 'Introduction', *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Diseases in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Yasmin Haskell (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), p. 4. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>18</sup> The term 'imagination' is used throughout the chapter primarily for convenience. In the wake of Kirk Essary's recent critical intervention in the study of emotions in the early modern period, in that he puts forth the idea that 'given the lexical latitude' of writers in the Renaissance period (Donne included) 'with respect to emotional vocabulary,' the use of the term 'imagination' here, for my purposes, is a viable option (373). Essary, 'Passions, Affections, or Emotions? On the Ambiguity of Sixteenth-Century Terminology', *Emotion Review*, 9.4 (2017), pp. 367-74. See also, Deanna Smid, *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature* (Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2017), esp. pp. 14-40. Moreover, James Kuzner's analysis of Donne's tract on suicide, *Biathanatos* (written 1608; published posthumously in 1644). focuses on how Donne presents his reader with a defence of an imaginative form of 'freedom... that is vexing rather than enabling or empowering', leading Kuzner to conclude that 'Donne urges epistemological humility, not epistemological confidence.' See Kuzner, 'Donne's *Biathanatos* and the Public Sphere's Vexing Freedom', *ELH*, 81.1 (2014), pp. 61-81, pp. 61, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Sidney, 'The Defence of Poesy', *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 216.



sanctity of his mind where he does ‘triumph like a king,’ through his world-creating abilities and is perfectly content for ‘[n]o worldly waves my mind can toss’ for all that he seeks is ‘to maintain a quiet mind.’<sup>20</sup> For Donne, the mind’s fire does not necessarily suggest the presence of greatness or divinity within humanity.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the power and the pleasure of imagination usually appear as mutually guaranteed in early modern literature, this is not the case with Donne. Donne’s writings on the imagination belie an epistemological humility that simultaneously upholds the internal faculty as a beacon of strength.

### Giddy Donne

This section argues that Donne’s writings reveal sustained attention towards this idea of the giddy mind straddling between intoxication, a numbing trance, as it were, on the one hand, and a kinetic ‘vertiginous’ feeling of disorientating mental travails, on the other. The remainder of this chapter explores how Donne grounds the negative aspects of apprehension into the related conceptual category of ‘giddiness’ to describe an individual’s cognitive state and, for the matter, entire nations. Therefore, to set Donne’s conjunction of giddiness and suffering in context, this section begins by tracing the negative associations that the word ‘giddy’ conjures

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Dyer, ‘My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is’, *English Poetry I: Chaucer to Gray*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, 51 vols. (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909-14), 41:211. On the contemporary debates surrounding the physical location of imagination, whether it be in the heart or the mind/brain, see Suparna Roychoudhury, *Phantasmatic Shakespeare: Imagination in the Age of Early Modern Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 27-55. Also, for recent examinations of Donne’s contribution to this debate, see Lianne Habinek, ‘Untying the “Subtle Knot”: Anatomical Metaphor and the Case of the *rete mirabile*’, *Configurations*, 20.3 (2012), pp. 239-77; and, Richard Sugg, ‘Flame into Being: Spirits, Soul, and the Physiology of Early Modern Devotion’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 46.1 (2016), pp. 141-65.

<sup>21</sup> This idea that the freedom or one’s ‘encouragement’ of imagination paradoxically leads to crippling ‘fevers and death’, chimes with Michel de Montaigne (1533-92). In his *Essays* (1580), Montaigne continually insists that imagination while incredibly vital, it also holds the potential to rebound and create feelings of pain within him: ‘It [the imagination] cuts a deep impression into me: my skill consists in avoiding it not resisting it.’ Unfortunately for the essayist, he admits that frequently, ‘[w]hen I contemplate an illness I seize upon it and lodge it within myself’ concluding this personal admission with the general theory that ‘I do not find it strange that imagination should bring *fevers* and death to those who let it act freely and who give it encouragement.’ See Michel de Montaigne, ‘On the power of the imagination’, *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 109.

in the early modern idiom. Following on from this, Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) is examined through its invocation of the term 'giddy'. In Donne's hands, 'giddy' signifies an emerging suspicion towards the supposed pleasures of the imagination that was an established tradition in the early modern period.<sup>22</sup> The suffering aspects of 'giddy' as invoked by Donne are shaped, in turn, by the term's use by his early modern contemporaries. With reference to contemporary accounts of the 'giddy' effects of the plague on victims in France, this chapter attends to the unappreciated relationship between the poet's giddy apprehensions alongside the giddy symptoms of those afflicted with pestilence.

'Giddy', according to the *OED*, when used as an adjective to describe a person, means to describe someone as 'mentally intoxicated; incapable of or indisposed to serious thought or steady attention; easily carried away by excitement'. Giddy defies neat categorisation – whether it is madness or excitement – and so it is ideally suited for Donne in that the term's ambivalence reflects the author's indecisive attitude to most aspects and causes in life.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, above all else, the giddy mind is a mind suffering from a loss of self-control.<sup>24</sup> According to Pauline Ellen Reid, giddiness for the early moderns could imply both a 'frenzied, dizzy motion of body and mind, *and* a heavy, stymied paralysis.'<sup>25</sup> The intoxication, incapacity,

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, the most famous comparison in early modern English literature of the poetic imagination to a kind of frenzy is Theseus's description of how in order for the poet to bestow to 'airy nothing / A local habitation and a name' his eye 'Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,' 'in a fine *frenzy*', Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.12-7, emphasis added). Katherine Bootle Attie's description of the line 'poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling' as evidence of the poet being 'maddened by his muse, delirious with inspiration' chimes with Donne's labelling of poets as 'Giddy'. See Attie, 'Passion Turned to Prettiness: Rhyme or Reason in *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 63.3 (2012), pp. 393-423, p. 397.

<sup>23</sup> Stubbs even goes so far to speculate towards the end of his biography, that, given his own endless internal civil wars in choosing which Christian faith (Catholic or Protestant) to uphold, had Donne lived until the English Civil War (1642-51), he 'would have abstained from taking sides altogether, [as he was] sickened by schism'. *Reformed Soul*, p. 447.

<sup>24</sup> Recall Edward II in Christopher Marlowe's play of the same name (as discussed in Chapter 2) when, near the beginning of the play, the first seeds of the king's impending loss of control – both of this kingdom and his own sanity – can be glimpsed in his excessive love for Gaveston, where, at the thought of his lover being sent away to interminable exile:

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,  
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,  
And with the noise turns up my *giddy* brain  
And make me frantic for my Gaveston. (1.4.311-4, emphasis added)

<sup>25</sup> Pauline Ellen Reid, 'Giddy Lies the Head that Wears the Crown: Apoplexy and Political Spectacle', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 19.1 (2016), pp. 1-28, p. 2. Emphasis in the original.

and incontinence of the giddy mind are strikingly analogous to contemporary descriptions of citizens struck down with the plague. Indeed, as Suparna Roychoudhury points out, '[t]ies between fever and plague were particularly strong'.<sup>26</sup> Roychoudhury also states that 'words such as *disease, plague, and infection...* were to some degree synonymous with *fever* in early modern England'.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the French surgeon Ambroise Paré's *A Treatise of the Plague* (written 1568; translated into English and published posthumously in 1630) details how he hopelessly watches his fellow citizens die, wherein the bodies and minds of the plague victim are affected: 'Many have a burning fever... and it causeth such a frenzy by inflaming the brain, that the patients running naked out of their beds, seek to throw themselves out of windows into the pits and rivers that are at hand.'<sup>28</sup> At the same time, in a sermon, Donne, looking on his internal 'spirit of Contradiction' informs his audience that his absolute failure to settle on an absolute answer in terms of religion as well as with virtually all aspects of life:

this is a sickly complexion of the soul, a dangerous impotencie, and a shrewd and ill-presaging *Crisis*... Not to be able to con-centre those doubts, which arise in my self, in a resolution at last, whether in Moral or in Religious actions, is rather a vertiginous giddiness, then a wise circumspection, or wariness.<sup>29</sup>

At first, it may seem quite the leap to suggest similarities between Paré's description of the ordeal of plague victims with Donne's ruminations on the internal crisis of indecision. However, the universal nature of both the pestilent fever with the internally wrought 'vertiginous giddiness,' is continually evoked by Donne to help explain his suffering. Indeed, as Ramie Targoff puts it, which is also applicable here, '[m]odest physical' and, by extension,

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<sup>26</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury, 'Forswearing Fever: Medicine, Materialism, and Shakespeare's Sonnet 147', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2012), pp. 4-25, p. 11, emphases in the original. For more on Donne's personal experience and literary representations ('translations') of the plague, see Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 189-214.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ambroise Paré, *A Treatise of the Plague* (London, 1630; S.T.C. 19192), pp. 27-8.

<sup>29</sup> John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. Evelyn Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), IX, p. 179. Emphasis in the original.

mental ‘symptoms become ecological disasters in Donne’s imaginative landscape.’<sup>30</sup> This idea of a ‘dangerous impotencie,’ ‘ill-presaging *Crisis*’ and, a ‘vertiginous giddiness,’ arising from one’s inability to remain internally fixed, or, in other words, to control one’s thoughts is given poetic expression in ‘Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one’ in his *Divine Meditations* sequence (written c. 1610-17).<sup>31</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth sonnet in *Divine Meditations*, Donne’s speaker offers an analogy between his ‘constant habit’ of ‘Inconstancy’ to the symptoms of a fever:

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. (2, 12-14)

Devotion to God for Donne is equal to suffering from a ‘fantastic ague’. Whereas for Foxe’s martyrs (as discussed in Chapter 1), thinking on God brings ‘such inward joy and peace of conscience,’ for Donne’s speaker, it produces suffering in the form of ‘devout fits’.<sup>32</sup> As Eric Langley argues, when Donne ‘requires a metaphor to describe his sense of self-defeating internal division, Donne has to adopt a pathologically exogenous motif to describe himself’, and, indeed, Langley goes on to quote a sermon by Donne where he describes himself as a ‘reciprocal plague... breath[ing] corruption... upon myself’.<sup>33</sup> The internal disturbances of Donne’s speakers are merged with the fear and effects of the pestilent fever that continually wreaked havoc on the English population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ramie Targoff, *John Donne: Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Contraries also meet in Donne’s poetry, for one can contrast the speaker’s vexing attitude towards contrariety in his *Divine Meditations* with his earlier ‘Elegy 17: *Variety*’ where the speaker offers a joyous paean to his subject matter, stating with a universal certainty that ‘All things do willingly in change delight’ (9).

<sup>32</sup> John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, eds. Stephen Reed Cattley and George Townshend, 8 vols (London: Seely and Burnside, 1839), VIII, p. 668.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Langley, *Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 95-6. Similarly, as Lianne Habineck points out in her examination of Donne’s ‘The Ecstasy’, ‘what ultimately allowed these two entities [corporeal and spiritual] to be bound together was less a physical reality than a rhetorical one’. See Lianne Habineck, ‘Untying the “Subtle Knot”’, p. 243.

<sup>34</sup> For a socio-historical understanding of the plague’s effects on the English population during this time, begin with Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

Donne, in a letter where he complains of being ‘subject to the barbarousnesse and insipid dulnesse of the Country,’ goes on to provide a list of contrasts between the external reality with his internal resources:

... for we are so composed, that if abundance, or glory, scorch and melt us, we have an earthly cave, our bodies, to go into... and if we be frozen... we have within us a *torch*, a soul, lighter and warmer then [sic] any without.<sup>35</sup>

Referring to this letter in his biography of Donne, John Stubbs dismisses it as evidence of the author’s ‘weak defiance’.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, later, in his verse letter ‘To Sir Edward Herbert, at Juliers’, Donne disavows the power of imagination, instead lamenting how ‘man can add weight to heaven’s heaviest curse’, for, as the speaker elaborates, ‘to the punishments which God doth fling, / Our apprehension contributes the sting’ (18, 21-2). The alliance between ‘apprehension’ and the sting of punishment reveals entrenched anxiety within early modern literary circles regarding the potential for one’s imagination to harm oneself.

The use of ‘*apprehension*’ in Donne’s verse letter is quite significant, for as Adam Rzepka has recently argued, in the early modern period, apprehension was capable of being ‘dangerously passive – open to any and all objects, real or imaginary – and dangerously

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<sup>35</sup> John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, ed. M. Thomas Hester (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1977), pp. 63-4. Likewise, in his ‘Of the Progress of the Soul’ (1612) – Donne’s sequel to ‘An Anatomy of the World’ (1611) – the internal resources, specifically, the power of thinking, is the safety valve that translates earthly division into harmony: ‘*Think* thyself labouring now with broken breath, / And *think* those broken and soft notes to be / Division, and thy happiest harmony’ (*Complete Poems*, 90-92). Emphases added.

<sup>36</sup> Stubbs, *The Reformed Soul*, p. 227. At the same time, this letter’s insistence that the ‘torch’ can help one overcome any obstacle is also prone to the same rebuke of Henry Bolingbroke given in response to the advice of his father, John of Gaunt, in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (1595). To offer some context: after Gaunt advises his son that even though the king has ordered Bolingbroke to be exiled, he should bear it lightly, for ‘gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite / The man that mocks at it and sets it light’. This, in turn, is mockingly torn apart by the son, who shrewdly rebuts with the blunt rhetorical question:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand  
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus,  
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite  
By bare imagination of a feast?  
(1.3.593-8)

productive in its power at least partly to compose what it presents to consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Rzepka's contemporary idea – primarily influenced by recent advances in cognitive studies – that the mind is 'dangerously passive' and 'dangerously' active in creating pain and suffering for itself is remarkably resonant with Donne's own reflection nearly four hundred years earlier. To take but one example, in Meditation 12 of his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) that humans 'are not only *passive*, but *active* too' in the 'destruction' of their physical and/or mental health.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the 'dangerously passive' and 'dangerously productive' qualities of apprehension are evident in Donne's *Satire I* ('Away thou fondling motley humorist') – written sometime in the early to mid-1590s.

In *Satire I*, Donne's speaker qualifies his longing for isolation by insisting that despite his physical solitude, he is not entirely abandoned, for his mind is in 'constant company' with his 'few books', where he claims:

Here are God's conduits, grave divines; and here  
 Nature's secretary, the Philosopher;  
 And jolly statesmen, which teach how to tie  
 The sinews of a city's mystic body;  
 Here gathering chroniclers, and by them stand  
 Giddy fantastic poets of each land.<sup>39</sup>  
 (1-10, emphasis added)

It appears as if the speaker is rehearsing the standard view that literature offers many benefits for writers and readers alike. The 'jolly statesmen' and 'Giddy fantastic poets' serve to spruce up the reader's imagination while the 'grave divines' and the 'Philosopher' help one reach God

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<sup>37</sup> Adam Rzepka, "'How like a god": Shakespeare and Early Modern Apprehension', *Shakespeare Studies*, 46 (2018), pp. 211-35, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), p. 63. Donne's *Devotions* will be discussed in greater length below.

<sup>39</sup> Incidentally, this association of poets with giddiness is evident in tributes of Donne himself following his death. In John Chudleigh's tribute, 'On *Dr John Donne*, late *Deane* of *S. Paules*', the speaker, casting his mind back to the licentious poet 'Jack' Donne as opposed to the reverential 'Doctor' Donne, fondly recalls: 'The first effects sprung in the giddy minde / Of flashy youth, and thirst of woman-kinde'. Chudleigh, 'On *Dr John Donne*, late *Deane* of *S. Paules*' (23-4), quoted in Sir Herbert Grierson, ed. *The Poems of John Donne* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 364.

and understand nature. However, upon closer inspection, all is not well with these companions. In this brief passage, Donne's speaker subtly counters the grasp for transcendence within literature with implicit reminders of mortality. The transience of life is reflected in the rapid procession of writers that the speaker has read, suggesting at once the speaker's extensive reading and the sense that time is running out and he is cramming as much as he can with the time he is given. Words such as 'grave', 'sinews', and 'body' sit uneasily with the speaker's claim of '*constant* company' for they conjure up contrasting imagery of death, bodily existence, while the reference to 'sinews' forces us to think on bone structure and, inevitably, of decay.<sup>40</sup> The phrasing of the line 'Here gathering chroniclers, and by them stand / Giddy fantastic poets' serves as much to resemble a funeral gathering than the life of creative imagination. Simultaneously, far from the divine makers that Sidney envisages poets to be, they are, by contrast, according to Donne, '[g]iddy'. Giddiness and the fantastical are at one and the same here to describe the poet. That is, the poetic imagination must somehow be affected with a kind of excess, an intoxication as it were. The poet does not conjure images that produce giddiness or delight in his readers as Sidney might see it, but instead, giddiness is an inextricable component of his nature.

Likewise, Donne, in a sermon preached at the marriage of the Earl of Bridgehouse's daughter to Lord Herbert on 19 November 1626, implores his audience to understand that the next life after death is to 'goe farther then thy selfe, out of thy selfe... for that is but a short, a *giddy*, a vertiginous walk'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the giddy mind is in close contact with transcendence. To be 'out of thy selfe' to strive to another realm can be said to ring eerily close to the poet's vocation. Thus, the poet's fantasy is activated by a giddiness that influences the poet's decision to form his thoughts into poetry. Similarly, as Brett Defries observes, Donne assumes that when

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<sup>40</sup> For more on the imagery of decay in Donne, see Eileen M. Sperry, 'Decay, Intimacy, and the Lyric Metaphor in John Donne', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 59.1 (2019), pp. 45-66.

<sup>41</sup> John Donne, *Fifty Sermons* (London, 1649; Wing D1862), p. 300.

it comes to passions and affections: '[w]e *suffer* them, they happen to us, but we also interpret them and let those interpretations influence future choices.'<sup>42</sup> This acute feeling that pain, like the plague, is waiting to 'happen' or engulf the unassuming individual is quite strong in, for instance, Donne's verse letter 'To Mr. T.W.' ('Haste thee harsh verse as fast as thy lame measure'). Here, as the speaker suffers a 'hell' when he has been deprived the company of the letter's addressee, and he laments that 'tis where I am [alone], where in every street Infections follow, overtake, and meet' (11-12). The description of 'Infections' as physically tracking down a person is akin to early modern theories of the thought-process itself, namely, the act of comprehension. At the same time as Donne's speaker can infect his otherwise perfect surroundings with his thoughts, so is it possible for whole nations to be enwrapped and possessed by the deranged minds of its people.

In his elegy 'Love's War', as the speaker contrasts the rules of engagement in the realms of love and war, Donne turns his attention to how England's deadly enemies (France and Ireland) are beset with a kind of communal sickness:

France in her lunatic giddiness did hate  
Ever our men, yea and our God of late...  
Sick Ireland is with a strange war possessed,  
Like to an ague, now raging, now at rest,  
Which time will cure, yet it must do her good  
If she were purged, and her head-vein let blood.  
(9-10, 13-16)

In or around the same year as Donne composed this elegy, Shakespeare has the titular king towards the end of his play *2 Henry IV* (c. 1596-99) use the word 'giddy' twice in two consecutive scenes. The first instance is when the ailing king notices how he is dying and says, 'now my sight fails, and my brain is *giddy*' (4.4.2862). Also, following this, to initiate the

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<sup>42</sup> Brett Defries, "'Whatsoever' Being: Agamben, Donne, and Lovability', *ELH*, 85.2 (2018), pp. 415-40, p. 422. Emphasis added.



backdrop for the plot of the succeeding play (*Henry V*), the dying king offers some strategic advice to his son, Prince Hal: ‘Be it thy course to busy *giddy* minds / With foreign quarrels’ (4.5.3109). Here, as in Donne’s elegy, there is a marked resemblance between the suffering of a giddy mind with the suffering that must inevitably accrue in any given war. Concurrently, it is possible to extend Erin Sullivan’s recent claim that, for Donne, the sufferings of the mind (melancholy, in this case) can ‘corrupt selfhood in a range of both trivial and grievous ways.’<sup>43</sup> For France and Ireland, ‘lunatic giddiness’ corrupts the selfhood of the nation, as it were, in a most grievous fashion. Although James Shapiro’s view that Donne is advocating for a bloody purge by the English on the Irish is valid, underneath the aggressive nationalism, there is an eye for the universal nature of human suffering.<sup>44</sup> For the sway of ‘lunatic giddiness’ to engulf a nation is markedly similar not to Galenic but to Donne’s indebtedness to Paracelsian theories of how man’s suffering is attuned to the natural world.<sup>45</sup>

According to Giulio J. Pertile, Paracelsus posits that ‘[m]an and nature... are more deeply and fully connected than the theory of humors suggest’. While Galenic humoralism retains that despite man’s intimate relationship to nature, there are still distinctly human qualities, for Paracelsus, by contrast, ‘man and nature are made up of the same substances, and there is nothing distinctive about matter in human form.’<sup>46</sup> Henceforth, in Donne’s view, the suffering that results in war and the competitiveness between nations – concepts that are universally supposed to be man’s invention alone – are symptoms of man’s influence under the natural world. Similar to how Montaigne’s example of the woman in pain through ‘*thinking*

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<sup>43</sup> Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> James Shapiro sees these lines of verse that pertain to the Nine Years’ War in Ireland (1594-1603) as indicative of the English people’s (Donne included) ‘desire for revenge and the satisfaction that will be derived from Irish blood-letting’. Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> For more on Paracelsus’s influence on Donne in particular, see Giulio J. Pertile, *Feeling Faint: Affect and Consciousness in the Renaissance* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2019), esp. pp. 100-101.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

she had swallowed a pin with her bread' can be 'attributed to the narrow seam between the soul and body, Donne imagines a seamless relationship between the suffering of man and his environment.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, Donne subsumes the suffering of France's civil wars and England's invasion of Ireland in the late sixteenth century under the banner of contagion. Far from Shapiro's thesis that this is just warmongering on Donne's part, there is also, it must be said, at least a suggestion of sympathy. The speaker only suggests that bloodletting will do 'her [Ireland] good', a temporary reprieve at best, whereas it is only the process of 'time' that will cure Ireland of her 'ague'. The speaker of this poem does not encourage the infliction of pain as one might expect a soldier to do, but instead, it chimes strikingly close to the reports of contemporary medical doctors. The patient is 'possessed', time will 'cure' the patient, but, of course, some 'purging' or bloodletting will help the fever run its course. Henceforth, Donne rhetorically pairs, or rather, rhetorically diagnoses France and Ireland's suffering to a sick patient with a fever.<sup>48</sup> The slips in cognition, the 'lunatic giddiness' and the 'ague' that physically impresses upon the individual, also for Donne, make an impression on the abstract, immaterial idea of the nation-state.

In Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) the giddy intoxication and ill-presaging apprehension are yoked together in vivid detail of the author's first-hand experience of a near-fatal fever late in life.<sup>49</sup> After having been struck down in the winter of 1623 with 'sodaine shakings,' or, in other words, after suffering from a near-fatal bout of spotted fever, Donne, during his lucid periods of convalescence, composed 23 meditations (a combination of

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<sup>47</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 89-90.

<sup>48</sup> Similarly, as Lianne Habinek points out in her examination of Donne's poem 'The Ecstasy', where the two lovers' bodies and spirits are yoked together, 'what ultimately allowed these two entities [corporeal and spiritual] to be bound together was less a physical reality than a rhetorical one'. Habinek, 'Subtle Knot', p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> On the relative underappreciation of *Devotions* in Donne critical studies, see the critical overview of *Devotions* in the recent illuminating study by Alexis Butzner, "I feare the more": Donne's *Devotions* and the Impossibility of Dying Well', *Studies in Philology*, 114.2 (2017), pp. 331-67, esp. pp. 333-6.

prose observations, poetry, and prayer) for each day of his sickness.<sup>50</sup> According to Donne's diagnostic report on himself:

hav[ing] used this leisure, to put the meditations had in my sicknesse, into some such order, as may minister holy delight... my friends importun'd me to print them, I importune my friends to receive them printed.<sup>51</sup>

Donne goes on to state that, although, for the most part, his mind is lucid while his body is physically useless, there is, however, a crucial moment where the opposite is true. For when Donne, now traduced from the commanding Dean of St. Paul's to a weak and temporarily bedridden patient, attempts to rise and stand still to meet his well-wishers, he notes, that 'I am *up*, and I seeme to *stand*, and I goe *round*... yet am [I] carried, in a giddy, and *circular motion*, as I stand'.<sup>52</sup> Donne is carried in a 'circular motion'. Thus, quite apart from the imagery of fire discussed in the first section, here instead, Donne's giddiness assumes imagery borrowed from the ocean.

Indeed, Donne describes himself as involuntarily suffering from a form of mental disorientation as he is carried in a 'giddy and circular motion'. Despite his outward, physical sense of balance, this lack of a fixed point within his mind encapsulates the image of the failure to 'con-centre' the doubts of a 'vertiginous giddiness' that he warned against in his sermon (as discussed above). Donne's epistemological agony calls everything into question. For instance, the description of the mind as carrying him in a 'circular motion' appropriates kinetic energy that is often presumed to be the preserve of the body, not the mind. He suffers from a complete

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<sup>50</sup> Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, pp. 398-406. Indeed, as Stubbs claims even though Donne, during his sickness was 'forbidden to read,' he, nonetheless, 'insisted on having pen and paper to hand even as he struggled for life' (400).

<sup>51</sup> John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, ed. Charles Edmund Merrill (New York: Sturgis and Walton Co., 1910), letter 90.

<sup>52</sup> John Donne, *Devotions*, p. 545. Similarly, this uncontrollable production of negative thoughts in Donne's giddy mind is echoed in Sir John Davies's (1569-1626) epigram 'In Cosmum' (1599) where all the interminable thoughts within Cosmus's head start 'raging in his minde, / To issue all at once so forwarde are, / As none at all can perfect passage finde.' Davies, *Epigrammes and Elegies* (London, 1599; S.T.C. 6350.5), p. 6.

failure to adequately describe not just the external world, as evident in that conditional ‘*seeme*’ to stand, but also, he is unable to describe his mind’s giddiness without recourse to the metaphoric language of physical movement (‘carried,’ ‘*circular motion*’). Seen in this light, Donne’s fever collapses the formal boundaries between his inner and outer worlds. His inability to register his own consciousness into terms other than physical movement is in accordance with the disorientating effects of giddiness that both convey a frenzied and uncontrollable rapidity in thoughts as well as mental intoxication or numbness. As a result, Donne’s giddy mind transcends its metaphoric domain and enters physical description as he is ‘carried, in a giddy’ manner.

This image of the suffering speaker inexorably swept along to his doom is used elsewhere by Donne. In ‘Elegy VI’ (‘O, let me not serve so’), Donne’s speaker paints his love as a ‘taper’ (candle) whose beams ‘Amorously twinkling, beckons the giddy fly, / Yet burns his wings’ (18-19). This metaphor offers up a subversive reminder of death when the speaker tries to liken his beloved’s attractive pull to the light that lulls the unsuspecting ‘giddy fly’. Nothing less than a fiery self-annihilation awaits the fate of the speaker. The metaphor of the ‘giddy fly’ lulled by the ‘twinkling’ beams of the beloved perfectly captures the evacuation of any agency concerning the speaker’s agony. Indeed, the poetic form of hyperbaton (where the usual word formation in a sentence is inverted) also suggests to us that just as the speaker’s emotional equilibrium has been subverted, so, too, has the poem’s equilibrium in terms of formal structure. For example, ‘Amorously twinkling, beckons the giddy fly’ in the place of the more conventional ‘the giddy fly is beckoned by the amorous twinkling’ hints at how the fly (the speaker) is being driven to his doom as he becomes side-lined in the sentence structure. ‘Giddy’ with its connotations of unsteadiness, also suggests a further evacuation of agency on the speaker’s part.

To add to this sense of self-evacuation, there is also a latent sense of diminishment. This can be found in the speaker's decision not to elide the word 'amorously' in particular. The speaker forces us to spend our time pronouncing this word. On the other hand, 'giddy fly' forces us to trip over these words, thereby adding to the sense that the speaker is not as worthy of our consideration as the beloved as the speaker's sense of self is overshadowed by his object of desire. This idea of the speaker's self-diminishing or weakening is reinforced by moments later in the elegy, where the speaker describes his tendency to be enwrapped in a 'speechless slumber' as he dreams of a stream (23). The predominant sibilant 's' sound injects a lulling smoothness that hearkens back to the 'giddy fly' doomed fate. Donne's poetic representation of the speaker's suffering employs the form of hyperbaton alongside the pointed use of the adjective 'giddy' to his image of himself as the fly in order to convey to the reader the overwhelming and uncontrollable nature of the speaker's suffering. Moreover, Donne further experiments with the poetic form to further his goal in representing the nature of suffering as it strips the speaker's thoughts to nothing more than their own pain.

For example, in his original style of versification in the first edition of the *Devotions*, Donne further conveys the fragile balance between control and looming collapse in what Gerard Passannante describes as his 'choppy lines':

Variable, and  
Therefore mi-  
serable con-  
dition of  
Man; this minute I was  
well, and am ill, this  
minute.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Gerard Passannante, 'On Catastrophic Materialism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 78.4 (2017), pp. 443-464, p. 456. Donne quotation taken from *Devotions*, p. 1. Elsewhere, Passannante notes how 'the small format of the [*Devotions*] frames an intimate nightmare.' Passannante, *Catastrophizing: Materialism and the Making of Disaster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 104. Incidentally, a similar view to Donne's can be gauged from George Herbert's poem 'Giddinesse', *The Temple* (1633). Here, too, the speaker bemoans 'Oh, what a thing is man!... He is some twentie sev'rall men at least / Each sev'rall houre.' Herbert, 'Giddinesse', *The Temple* (London, 1633; S.T.C. 13183), p. 120.

With the words chopped up and tottering over the edge of the line, the verses' unpredictability visually signifies man's 'miserable condition'. It is continuously varying, and yet there is some remnant of purpose, a point of return: that is, the admission that it is our 'condition', our essence of being miserable. As Ewan Fernie puts it in his analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies, the artist strives to reveal that 'some form of subjection is the inescapable human condition'.<sup>54</sup> The inability to sever the opposed feelings of wellness and illness suggests that Donne's diagnosis of the suffering mind overturns the Galenic guiding principle of melancholy. Here, Donne figures human nature ('miserable condition of man') as the inherent source of infection or suffering. Although this may seem bizarre for the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral to align God's universal love with the universal suffering from the plague, this metaphor fits with not only the period's writings on the plague but also Donne's own views on how there is within giddiness a heuristic tool to help explain away not just the restless mind of an individual, but also, the fever that can grip a nation.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Amid the confusion and wrangling within the intellectual culture as to the status, location, and benefits/faults of the imagination, Donne's writings emerge as a distinctive voice that explores the 'miraculously destr[uctive]' nature and feverish functions/infections of the imagination. Even though the imagination was traditionally upheld as the locus of subjectivity and

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<sup>54</sup> Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 112.

<sup>55</sup> In her analysis of plague pamphlets produced in England at the turn of the seventeenth century, Chloe Kathleen Preedy, for example, lists how: 'The physician William Bullein identifies "plague" and "pestilence" as divine calls to repentance... Thomas Nashe characterized the London plague epidemic of 1593 as God's judgement... and the physician-playwright Thomas Lodge begins his 1603 *Treatise of the Plague* with a prayer to "Almightie God"'. Preedy, 'The Smoke of War: From *Tamburlaine* to *Henry V*', *Shakespeare*, 15.2 (2019), pp. 1-25, p. 2.

individuation since antiquity, writers like Donne – particularly towards the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – found it necessary to confront the mercurial nature of imagination. Thus, Donne reveals how the imagination can be understood as leading one to be consumed, or rather, infected with detrimental effects. This chapter contends that this ambivalence, or rather, this inherent tension towards the imagination, can be gauged at the level of ontology. In the early modern period, creative genius was often described with reference to the related concepts of the mind's fire and giddiness. While most writers since antiquity had often aligned these concepts together to form a sequence of events that lead to innumerable benefits, Donne instead focuses on the capacity for the giddiness of the mind to result in negative (harmful) consequences.

Indeed, Donne's explanatory principle for the mind's sufferings is that the 'pre-apprehensions' that do daily plague us are ingrained in the powers of self-sensing that a giddy mind affords. In other words, the vitality that accompanies the giddy mind, or, more specifically, the giddy poet, precedes the onslaught of involuntary thoughts and misgivings that negatively sears the mind and ripples throughout the body. The keynote impression of the mind that so gripped Donne and was subsequently a constant feature throughout his career is the vertiginous giddiness and fever that arises amid doubt. Donne's insistence that the fire of the mind is at the root of giddiness, phantasmatic fevers separates his understanding of the imagination's capacity to induce suffering from that of his contemporaries. From the pre-apprehensions to his exploration of the 'giddy', a distinctly Donnean phenomenology of the imagination emerges. Hiding within the traditional practice of metaphorically yoking the imagery of fire with the imagination, Donne argues, is the source of mental pain. The poet's openness to the giddy fires, Donne argues, makes way for unstable sentience.

From the heights of poetic glory to the lows of a patient unable to stand unassisted, the giddy mind reminds us that the fire of the mind has the power to relinquish any sense of

equilibrium. Simultaneously, Donne's literary and autobiographical (as evident in his *Devotions*) representations of the pain incumbent upon our 'pre-apprehensions' of a future occurrence of physical torment offer us a new early modern understanding of the pain that is not immediately qualified by Galenic explanations. Donne grounds the universal nature of these fears and doubts in the pestilent fever imagery that ravaged England's population. Donne offers a more vivid picture of both the universal qualities of both the pestilence and the imagination's self-destructive tendencies. Donne's aesthetic engagements with the ontology and effects of the imagination suffuse his writings with a life-long struggle to conceive of and adequately represent the mind's capacity for wreaking destruction upon itself.



## Chapter 4

### Monstrous Suffering in Marvell

This chapter applies the interpretive lens of ‘monstrous suffering’ to the poetry of Andrew Marvell (1621-78).<sup>1</sup> In the early modern period, monstrosity is intimately connected with the imagination, specifically, the poetic imagination. As formulated by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy* (1595): ‘lifted up with the vigour of his own invention,’ the poet creates ‘Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like’.<sup>2</sup> Tapping into the ‘loaded early modern discourse on monstrosity’, Sidney’s praise of the poetic imagination celebrates the monstrous as the hallmark of an active poetic imagination.<sup>3</sup> However, as Maik Goth points out, Sidney’s theory of the monstrous capabilities of the imagination does not ‘make the imagination less problematic and the monster more desirable.’<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this chapter will be as much about the monstrosity of suffering – the uncaring, inhumane forms that suffering can take – as the suffering of monstrosity – the unique, undecipherable pains that monsters share with humans. Marvell’s roughly contemporary poems ‘A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body’ (c. 1645-52) and ‘The Unfortunate Lover’ (c. 1649) will be the prime examples of this chapter in which it is argued that Marvell creates fantastic (monstrous) beings to reflect upon the inherent tensions within the relationship of the imagination to the monstrous.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all subsequent dates and citations of Marvell’s poetry are taken from *Andrew Marvell: The Collected Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin Books, 2005), and will be cited parenthetically within the text by line number.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Maik Goth, *Monsters and the Poetic Imagination in The Faerie Queene* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> It should be underscored here that the date of composition for Marvell’s poems are notoriously hard to pinpoint with precision. Apart from the contemporary references to Marvell as an established poet, the publication of Marvell’s poetry did not occur until 3 years after the poet’s death (1681) in the *Folio* edition of his works. As alluded to in the previous note, I follow the dating as provided by Elizabeth Story Donno. As a

The first section begins with ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’ to establish Marvell’s incorporation of the monstrous when describing the soul. Indeed, when it comes to how the individual understands the source of their pain – in the body or the immaterial mind/soul – Marvell does not merely reiterate the brain’s hierarchy over the body. Instead, what emerges in Marvell’s poem tends to be a fusion of both the concrete (physical) body with the conceptual (imagination) to reassign the negative emotions as capable of creating a nuanced understanding of the relations between (and within) the human and non-human. Not just monstrous in its relationship to the body, there is ample evidence – both in the imagery and shifting amorphous metaphors – to suggest that the soul is monstrous in and of itself. Therefore, the soul’s suffering must be explained through blurred categories of meaning accomplished through Marvell’s incorporation of early modern ideas of the monster.

The second section brings the focus to Marvell’s ‘The Unfortunate Lover’. Bringing the theories of ‘new materialism’ to bear upon the nature of suffering that is thrust upon the poor lover is shown to announce that the separation of human from non-human suffering is hereby dissolved. Taking the poem’s description of the poor lover as an ‘amphibium of life and death’ seriously, the poor lover’s suffering will be read in tandem with the affordances enabled by the idea of monstrous suffering (40). For instance, pushing against the critical grain established by Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker (discussed at length below), the poor lover’s relationship with personified Nature is shown not to be a narrative of triumphalism over pain, but rather, is an exploration into the blurred realities of human and non-human (monstrous) suffering.

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representative example for the notorious difficulty of dating Marvell’s poetry, see the contentious debates regarding the date of Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’ (c. 1651) that is summarised in Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, ‘High Summer at Nun Appleton, 1651: Andrew Marvell and Lord Fairfax’s Occasions’, *The Historical Journal*, 36.2 (1993), pp. 247-69.

Building upon recent critical readings of the early moderns' literary and cultural depictions of the monster, it will be shown how suffering in Marvell's poetry gestures beyond the human.<sup>6</sup> Marvell's poetry, it is argued, unsettles the lines forged by the mind-body problem, in direct contrast to the Cartesian separation of mind and body that was emerging in the mid-seventeenth century. In Marvell's poetry, monstrous suffering is an avenue through which he can flex his poetic anthropomorphism, therefore, a more extensive understanding of Marvell's attention to the incorporation of suffering across entities necessitates a new reading. In this way, suffering enlightens Marvell's speakers to envision a spectrum in which it is possible to measure the continuities between human and monstrous suffering.

### **'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' and the Monstrous**

In Sir Thomas Browne's (1605-82) *The Garden* (1658), the divisions between body and soul are summarily refuted, if not outright ignored. Indeed, according to Mary E. Zimmer, for Browne, it was 'not matter and mind, but matter becoming mind; not body and soul, but body becoming soul; not macrocosm and microcosm, but macrocosm becoming microcosm.'<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Browne's idea that the body and soul blossom together grows out of his expostulation fifteen years earlier at least in his *Religio Medici* (1643) where he declares our passions to be 'wonders in true affection; it is a body of enigmas, mysteries and riddles; wherein two so

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<sup>6</sup> The representative example of reading for vitalism in Marvell can be found in John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 51- 60 and *passim*; more recent examples include Leah S. Marcus, 'Marvell's "Nymph Complaining" and the Erotics of Vitalism', *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, eds. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 371-86; and, William Fitzhenry, 'Materiality and Satire in Marvell's "The Last Instructions to a Painter"', *Marvell Studies*, 5.1 (2020), pp. 1-27, esp. pp. 4-5, 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Mary E. Zimmer, 'Seeking to Become All Things: The Neoplatonic Soul and the Next World in Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*', *The Modern Language Review*, 112.1 (2017), pp. 35-53, p. 38.

become one, as they both become two'.<sup>8</sup> What is most striking in Browne's diagnosis is that as if almost by compulsion or an unconscious muscle reaction, when describing 'true affection', Browne reverts to the use of somatic imagery in '*body of enigmas*'. Browne's need to use somatic imagery to provide a familiar shape to the emotions is taken to 'monstrous' lengths in Marvell's 'The Unfortunate Lover' (1649) and 'Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome' (1646). First, an introduction to Marvell's monstrous conflation of the body and mind can be established through the example of Marvell's 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' (c. 1645-52).

When describing the soul's entanglements with the body's fleshly 'dungeon', Marvell creates a nightmarish revision of Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1490):

O, who shall from this dungeon raise  
A soul, enslaved so many ways,  
With bolts of bones, that fettered stands  
In feet, and manacled in hands.  
Here blinded with an eye; and there  
Deaf with the drumming of an ear,  
A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains  
Of nerves, and arteries, and veins,  
Tortured, besides each part,  
In a vain head, and double heart?  
(1-10)

This idea of the human being consisting of a split constitution – split along the lines of possessing a body and spirit – is, of course, a theory that has its origins in antiquity. Again, for the soul and body to be at odds with one another is not an original concept. Marvell's innovation lies in the poem's ability to indict both parties – the soul and body – with the charge of monstrosity.

According to the soul, the body is monstrous through its inhumane 'torturing' of the soul. In keeping with the architectural metaphor that the body is a dungeon, the parts ('bones',

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<sup>8</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1682; Wing B5178), p. 151.

‘nerves, and arteries and veins’) serve as the implements of torture (‘bolts’ and ‘chains’) that the soul suffers. The image of the soul ‘hung up, as ’twere, in chains’ may suggest itself as a reference to the suffering of forcefully domesticated animals. The popular sport of bear-baiting comes to mind wherein the chained bear has to fend off attacking dogs for the entertainment of human spectators (often a preamble of sorts for the dramatic theatre, bear-baiting, in some cases, became the main attraction). Indeed, Thomas Willis (1621-75), an exact contemporary of Marvell’s and a founding member of the Royal Society, proposes in his *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes* (written 1672; posthumously published 1683): ‘Man [is] a Two-soul’d Animal, and as it were a manifold Geryon.’<sup>9</sup> For Willis, the animalistic (or lower) parts of the soul add up to establish man as a monstrous ‘manifold Geryon’. The choice of monster – Geryon is a fearsome giant – suggests that Willis views the ‘Two-soul’d Animal’ monstrosity as a problem encountered with suspicion at best or, worse still, repulsion.<sup>10</sup> Marvell taps into this alliance between man’s baser animalistic qualities and the alterity embedded within monstrosity to reconfigure the soul’s suffering in an amorphous manner.

Indeed, in the lines cited above, the soul shifts from an initial interrogative fashion (‘O, who shall from this dungeon raise’) to a mode of discovery (‘here blinded... and there / Deaf’) that signals its close association with the rhetorical style of imperatives that conscript the addressee’s powers of discernment. To put it another way, the implied invocation to see how the soul is paradoxically blinded by the body’s imposition of its eyes and ears adds to amazement that is often the result of encountering monsters (established in the Soul’s interrogative opening). Thus, the suffering of the soul shifting as it does from the architectural metaphor – the body-as-dungeon- of the first stanza – to the second stanza’s oceanic metaphor

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes* (London, 1683; Wing W2856), no pagination.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Willis’s perception of the monstrous nature of the two souls, see James Jaehoon Lee, ‘John Donne and the Textuality of the Two Souls’, *Studies in Philology*, 113.4 (2016), pp. 879-918, esp. pp. 887-8. Geryon is a three-headed monster from classical mythology. See, for example, *Dante’s Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 127.

employed by the body (discussed below) is in keeping with the inexplicability or, more accurately, the multiplicity (multi-headed) monstrosity of the body and soul. What is more, while it is conventional for the body to be a ‘dungeon’, a monstrous prison for the soul, the monstrous imagery rebounds back upon the soul itself, thereby complicating who exactly is the monster. For example, the imagery of the soul ‘manacled’ and ‘hung up’ with the body’s chains signifies that the soul is a monster who is captured to amaze a spectator.<sup>11</sup> The monstrous metaphor is not just directed at the soul’s relationship to the body. Instead, by positing the amorphous nature of the soul in and of itself, Marvell alerts the reader to the possibility that the soul is inherently monstrous even without the body’s interjection. In a phrase: the body is merely the dungeon and chains that tie the monstrous soul to one place. As such, the myriad forms that the soul’s suffering can transform from one metaphor to the next lies in Marvell’s innovation of what can be tentatively labelled as ‘monstrous suffering’. Labelled rather than categorised as ‘monstrous suffering’ is in keeping with the monster’s ability to mould different categories of meaning at an exponential pace. Indeed, it is precisely this monstrous mode of negating taxonomies that will preoccupy Marvell’s engagement with monstrous suffering within this poem.

For instance, with the return of the soul in the third stanza of ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’, Marvell goes on to employ the oceanic metaphor to depict the disorientation that the soul expresses as it attempts to come to terms with the mysterious source of the body’s various forms of pain:

What magic could me thus confine  
Within another’s grief to pine,

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<sup>11</sup> Compare Macbeth’s description of his fear of the invading army headed by Macduff has ‘tied me to a stake. I cannot fly’ which reflects the bear-baiting practice that has been already alluded to. Macduff, much like Willis, seizes upon the animal imagery and turns it into one of monstrosity when he taunts Macbeth with the threat: ‘We’ll have thee, as our rarer *monsters* are, / Painted upon a pole’ (*Macbeth* 5.7.1, 55-6. Emphasis added). Cf. In *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1606-7) when Antony prophesies that defeat under the hands of Caesar will see Cleopatra ‘[m]ost monster-like be shown’ to the paying spectator (4.12.36).

...  
Constrained not only to endure  
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure:  
And ready oft the port to gain,  
Am shipwrecked into health again?  
(21-22, 27-30)

Although Marvell utilises the conventional literary topoi that figured the soul's relationship to the body as akin to that of a shipwreck, he does, however, complicate this analogy. According to Michel-André Bossy, the medieval debates about the mind-body problem usually held that the personified Soul was the incompetent helmsman in the shipwreck metaphor. Marvell, of course, reverses this trope by having the Soul voice this complaint against his counterpart.<sup>12</sup> Further, by suggesting that the shipwreck – an outcome that one assumes is undesirable at the very least – brings the soul and body together in 'health', Marvell completely reimagines suffering as somehow conducive to the relations between the soul and body.<sup>13</sup> As Hillary Eklund describes in her analysis of the oceanic metaphor, a shipwreck is 'the disorientating chaos bred of the failed conveyance' of souls from the sea.<sup>14</sup> However, in Marvell's hands, the shipwreck does not disorientate; instead, it serves as a metaphor for health. This healthy shipwreck flies in the face of common sense, for how is it possible that the suffering and death – encompassed in the 'shipwreck' – signify a return to health? The answer lies in reading Marvell's poem as a 'monstrous' text. More than just being a malformed creature, monstrosity lurks behind Marvell's poem's formal and thematic ability to break categories through a typically Marvellian chameleonic – that is, excessive – set of associations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Michel-André Bossy, 'Medieval Debates of Body and Soul', *Comparative Literature*, 28.2 (1976), pp. 144-63, pp. 160-61.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent examination of the origins and development of how this oceanic trope connotes pain and suffering in early modern English literature, see Suparna Roychoudhury, 'Mental Tempests, Seas of Trouble: The Perturbations of Shakespeare's *Pericles*', *English Literary History*, 82.4 (2015), pp. 1013-1039; and Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), esp. pp. 1-24.

<sup>14</sup> Hillary Eklund, 'Shakespeare's Littoral and the Dramas of Loss and Store', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 59.2 (2019), pp. 349-65, p. 354.

<sup>15</sup> See Nigel Smith's elaboration of Marvell's status as a literary chameleon in his *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (London: New Haven Press, 2010), esp. pp. 1-11.

Being monstrous in its tortured existence conjoined with its (also squabbling) body, the Soul tries desperately to suspend the representational abilities of the poetic text itself precisely as it attempts to distil its monstrous pain. ‘What *magic* could me thus confine’ asks the Soul. It would be a mistake to read this line as Marvell’s participatory rhetorical question that beckons for the reader to supply an answer to this most perennial of questions: why is the soul trapped in a body? Instead, the reader must bear witness to this monstrous revelation that the soul – the supposed source of the divine within us – is useless when it comes to explaining its symptoms. The knotted syntax in ‘I feel, that cannot feel’ signifies that the soul finds it difficult to overcome the messy business of deciphering its pain from the body’s. Marvell’s use of ‘magic’ is poignant in that within the context of this poem, this ambiguous and free-standing noun is entirely at odds with Thomas Hobbes’s (1588-1679) project to reinscribe language after the confusing chaos of the English Civil Wars with ‘the *magic* that enables us to jump the limitations of the natural, animal mind.’<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Marvell hews closer to the view that it is too curious to consider too much into the workings of human – and the soul’s – harmful affairs.<sup>17</sup>

The Body’s pain within this ‘Dialogue’ is also monstrous in the same manner as the Soul’s excessive use of associations. Blaming the Soul for teaching it ‘maladies’ that cannot be contained within the realm of medicine (‘physic yet could never reach’), the Body lists how the Soul informs its unwilling student about how ‘the cramp of hope does tear... Which

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 25. Emphasis mine. Moreover, the analogy of the freedom afforded through language as resembling the act of ‘jump[ing]’ over our animalistic ‘limitations’ is one to be taken up later by Marvell’s friend, John Milton (1608-74). For example, in his description of Satan’s ‘contempt[ible]’ defiance of God as he ‘leap’d’ over the ‘bound / Of Hill or highest Wall,’ when he sneaks into the Garden of Eden. See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 425, 4.181-2.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as Marvell was later to say of the manifold attempts to find the source of the mid-seventeenth century’s outbreak of internecine struggles in England, Marvell scathingly dismisses these attempts with his pithy response in his prose pamphlet *The Rehearsall Transpros’d* (1672) that ‘it is not worth the labour to enquire’ into such inexplicable things. See Andrew Marvell, *The Rehearsall Transpros’d* in *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell*, 2 vols. eds. Martin Dzelzainis and Annabel Patterson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.192.



knowledge forces me to know, / And memory will not forgo' (31, 33-4, 39-40). By blending the sensation of a cramp within the muscle – a trait shared by humans and animals – with the uniquely human conception of hope, Marvell proposes a counterpoint to the early modern understanding that the cramp was an affliction whose sole target – or, more precisely, whose sole victim – was the body. Concurrently, as the 'cramp of hope does tear,' the word 'tear' in the sense of rendering apart or ripping apart is more inclined to describe the 'tear[ing]' apart of a physical object (in this case, the body of the voice appropriately named 'Body'). Nevertheless, when it speaks of the 'palsy shakes', the following line ends with the half-rhyme of 'fear'. The reader's urge to complete the rhyme by emphasising the 'e' sound instead of 'a' forces 'tear' to signify the drops of water instead of the eyes because of emotion. Thus, the two meanings offered by one's pronunciation of 'tear' point towards the body's physical manifestation of the soul's 'maladies'.

The figurative language of 'cramp of hope' completely upends the quest for superiority between the poem's two combatants. Instead, what is presented within the poem is a temporary truce of sorts between the belligerent voices. For instance, the metaphorical conjunction of the vehicle 'cramp' to the tenor 'hope' instils a sense of continuity between involuntary physical reactions and intangible spiritual or mental conditions that were traditionally understood as incompatible. 'Cramp', as the *OED* defines it, is 'an involuntary, violent and painful contraction of the muscles, usually resulting from a slight strain, a sudden chill, etc.'<sup>18</sup> Often associated with the pangs of hunger, a cramp does not appear at first, as fitting the metaphoric vehicle that wishes to arrive on its target of 'hope'. Hope, after all, attests to an abstract, elusive, and transcendent nature. Practically synonymous with the promise of salvation in the form of the afterlife, hope is conventionally understood as a product or, more accurately, a figment of human intellection. However, the level of desire implicit in 'hope' paves the way for Marvell

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<sup>18</sup> *OED*, n. 1.

to propose that this longing for hope need not be the preserve of humans. Body and Soul's monstrous commixture is achieved precisely through the ability to suffer, which, in turn, transgresses the supposedly rigid boundaries between the immaterial and the flesh. This sort of monstrous suffering is the focus of the next section's analysis of 'The Unfortunate Lover'.

### **Marvell's Unfortunate Lover: The Amphibium of Life and Death**

At the outset, the opening stanza of 'The Unfortunate Lover' does not suggest itself as a monstrous text. If there is any suffering to be had, it is the speaker's nostalgic longing for an unspecified time and place ('Alas, how pleasant are their days / With whom the infant Love yet plays!' [1-2]). The AABB rhyme scheme draws the reader in as they are lulled and comforted by the ever-reliable couplets. Suffering, in this context, appears to be one of privation wherein the pastoral scene created by the speaker resides in his imagination. So far, so typically Marvellian to the extent that poems such as 'The Garden' and his Mower poems are often interpreted as efforts by the poet to, in the words of Harry Berger, Jr., provide 'a temporary haven for recreation or clarification' in its positive aspects or, negatively, they are symptomatic of Marvell's urge to 'abolish time and flux'.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, an image of time and flux even within 'The Unfortunate Lover'. Indeed, while the pastoral escape of the first stanza may appear as a non-starter separate from the poem's unfolding narrative of the titular unfortunate lover, there is a subtle cue within this pastoral retreat to suggest itself as a

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<sup>19</sup> Harry Berger, Jr., 'The Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World', in *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making*, ed. John Patrick Lynch (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 3-40, p. 36.

premonition of the monstrous suffering that is the focus of this poem as well as the present discussion.

Introducing unnamed ‘pairs’ of lovers who are ‘[s]orted’ by personified Love, and who are, indeed, play companions of this Love, the speaker maintains that these extraordinary lovers

... still are seen  
By fountains cool, and shadows green.  
But soon these flames do lose their light,  
Like meteors of a summer’s night[.]  
(3-8)

The birth of the monster, according to David Cressy, ‘served as a sign of’ the present.<sup>20</sup> Corrupt in the political sphere and/or bankrupt in morals, the monstrous birth was presaged by irregular occurrences of nature. The ‘meteors’ of the final line quoted above are Janus-faced – that is, they serve a dual purpose.<sup>21</sup> As a simile, the meteor’s short lifespan resembles losing the lover’s ‘flames’. Conversely, the reference to ‘meteors’ carries traces of imagery associated with unnatural portents that forebode a monster’s birth – in this case, the poor lover.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the meteors serve as a warning that the poem intends to cross the bridge between the light of the ‘pleasant days’ to the dark, painful birth and life of the lover. Marvell appears to be employing a similar technique that was common for astronomers and so-called prophets of his time. Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), the noted theologian – and, coincidentally, the first to provide an account of the Reverend Andrew Marvell’s (the poet’s father) drowning in the Humber River in 1641 – warned his countrymen upon the accession of Charles I in 1625 that if they did not pay the necessary attention to the portents that God lays before them: ‘Our

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<sup>20</sup> David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1989), p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note (and is discussed at length below) how the poor lover, too, is also Janus-faced.

<sup>22</sup> In the entirety of Marvell’s poetic canon, there are only two references to ‘meteors’. Apart from ‘The Unfortunate Lover’ near the beginning of his poetic output, Marvell does not mention meteors until ‘The Third Advice to a Painter’ (1666) towards the end of his career. Here, the portentous significance of the meteor is made explicit: ‘So have I seen, ere human quarrels rise, / Foreboding meteors combat with the skies.’ See Nigel Smith, ed. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* (Harlow: Longman, 2007), p. 347, ll. 29-30.

Candle will be extinguished, a night will come, an eternal night of destruction both of body and soul'.<sup>23</sup> In both texts, the extinguishing of the light – the lovers' 'flames' in Marvell, the national 'candle' in Fuller – is accompanied by a grave portent.<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that the birth of the monster, in this case, the poor lover, signifies the emergence of evil.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the poor lover is monstrous in that he/it bears the hallmarks of category-breaking and uncertainty that ties him to early modern projections of the monster as it pertains to the monster's birth being presaged by the emergence of unnatural occurrences – that is, portents.<sup>26</sup> For now, the point being is that the poor lover's monstrosity disturbs existing ways of understanding the suffering of others. When the other is, in this case, a monster, uncertainty bleeds into the lover's response to his own blood (discussed at length during the examination of the penultimate stanza below). Shifting the focus to monstrous suffering's ability to blur boundaries between passive and active, the argument shifts into an examination of the incorporation of the human and non-human of the lover's pain following his birth in a shipwreck.

Indeed, in what is perhaps the most vivid image in the entirety of Marvell's poetic canon that illustrates the terrible power of suffering is the 'numerous fleet of cormorants black' that torture the shipwrecked orphan in 'The Unfortunate Lover'. From the pleasures of the pastoral idyll, the reader is unexpectedly plunged into the horrors of a shipwreck – during which we

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Fuller, *A Sermon Intended for Paul's Cross, but Preached in the Church of St. Paul's* (London, 1626; S.T.C. 11467), pp. E4<sup>v</sup>-F1<sup>r</sup>. On Fuller's near contemporary account of Reverend Marvell's death, see Hilton Kelliher, *Andrew Marvell: Poet & Politician, 1621-78* (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the timing of Fuller's sermon is significant for it was delivered amid not only Charles I's Ascension Day, but as with all ascension days during the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline periods, they were accompanied by devastating bouts of plague. On apocalyptic explanations of natural disasters in England, see Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); and, more recently, Gerard Passannante, 'The Art of Reading Earthquakes: On Harvey's Wit, Ramus's Method, and the Renaissance of Lucretius', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 61.3 (2008), pp. 792-832.

<sup>25</sup> Compare Marvell's praise for Oliver Cromwell in what is 'considered by many to be the greatest political poem in the English language', 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland' (1650). Cromwell is a monstrous force for good (in the poet's eyes), while, at the same time, he shares the meteoric pyrotechnic qualities of the poor lover ('Then burning through the air he went, / And palaces and temples rent' [21-2]). The description of the 'Horatian Ode' as the 'greatest political poem' is taken from Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell*, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> As Mark Thornton Burnett points out: 'In Latin... a *monstrum* is a portent, prodigy or sign as well as an "unnatural thing"'. See Burnett, *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 2. Emphasis in the original.

encounter the speaker's beloved's birth and tempestuous life. Thus, the sole survivor is stranded on a broken plank where he is soon 'befriended' by cormorants. Offering torture from above, these cormorants ('Guardians most fit to entertain / The orphan of the hurricane') engage in a balanced form of torture wherein:

They fed him up with hopes and air,  
Which soon digested to despair,  
And as one cormorant fed him, still  
Another on his heart did bill,  
Thus while they famish him, and feast,  
He both consumed, and increased:  
And languished with doubtful breath,  
The amphibium of life and death.  
(31-40)

Alongside the 'doubtful breath' of the speaker, his condition of being the 'amphibium of life and death' places his selfhood in a fragile state that reinforces an overwhelming sense of instability. In Derek Hirst's and Steven Zwicker's reading of this poem, they gloss Marvell's line 'amphibium of life and death' as annihilating. Indeed, this is, in their view, the denouement of the previous stanzas' 'passivity and complicity' whereas the following stanzas erupt to form a 'powerful act of self-fashioning' in that the 'orphan of the hurricane' is transformed into the mythical superhero 'Ajax braving the tempest'.<sup>27</sup> While Hirst and Zwicker are correct in pinpointing Marvell's celebrated equipoise in his balancing of passivity and self-fashioning, more can be said about the annihilation that takes place in the lover's status as an amphibian of life and death. It is worth pausing here to compare the difference in meaning concerning the poor lover's 'languished' state with the speaker's 'languishing' in Marvell's roughly contemporaneous 'Upon Appleton House' (c. 1651).

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<sup>27</sup> Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse: Imagining Andrew Marvell', *ELH*, 74.2 (2007), pp. 371-95, pp. 376-77.

The speaker's immersion into the wooden landscape of his surroundings in 'Upon Appleton House' can also be considered as another instance where Marvell confronts the potential for suffering to be monstrous. The difference between the two poems' depictions of monstrous suffering is that whereas in 'The Unfortunate Lover' the poor lover is whisked away by Nature to be entangled in its monstrous web, the speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' seeks monstrosity with fierce intentionality from the beginning of his immersion. By contrast, 'languishing with ease' (593) in the surrounding woods of Nun Appleton, the speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' actively seeks to forget himself, or, in Marvell's language, he gives himself over to the 'cool zephyrs... Who, as my hair, my thoughts too shed' (598-9). The speaker goes on to offer his gratitude to his natural surroundings twice – to the 'mossy banks, and 'cool zephyrs' – indicating a profound, if not erotically perverse, pleasure in pain. The speaker's pleas for the ornaments of nature to trap him suggesting that the speaker's sovereign mind and individuality are willingly rejected, favouring a mindless – monstrous – existence. Within the speaker's transformation, there is a budding sense that suffering is a desirable state of being to the extent that it enables the speaker to obtain preternatural knowledge, or, in other words, a prelapsarian state of being where all distinctions, boundaries, and hierarchies between the speaker, nature, and non-human life are erased.

In stanza 76 of 'Upon Appleton House,' the speaker appears to further dissolve into the (wooden) landscape: 'How safe, methinks, and strong, behind / These trees have I encamped my mind' (601-2). In Tzachi Zamir's analysis of the significance of trees in early modern literature, he finds that '[p]oetically... [the tree] is a devastating image of grief as an icon that externalizes the quasi-vegetative structure of grief, the continuation of a stunted life.'<sup>28</sup> While,

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<sup>28</sup> Tzachi Zamir, 'Wooden Subjects', *New Literary History*, 39.2 (2008), pp. 277-300, p. 286. If, according to Shannon Kelley, '[w]e know that in Renaissance literature trees connote strength, perpetuity, the family, or the crown', it is also possible that trees connote weakness and suffering. Fradubio, the lover forcefully turned into a tree in Edmund Spenser's (c. 1552/3-99) *Faerie Queene* (1590), erupts 'Smal drops of gory blood,' as his bough is plucked by an unsuspecting Redcrosse, who is startled by the tree's 'piteous yelling voice'. John Donne

at first blush, a ‘stunted life’ may suggest connotations of a stale and ultimately fruitless existence, for Marvell (and other metaphysical poets), captivity has the counterintuitive potential to afford the imprisoned individual a feeling of freedom from pain.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as James Kuzner points out, ‘freedom in metaphysical poetry plunges subjects into states to which they contribute virtually nothing and that are so intense as to be hardly recognizable as human.’<sup>30</sup> In the context of ‘Upon Appleton House’, the speaker’s ‘encampment’ of his mind into the tree is monstrous not just in terms of the human’s incorporation into the non-human, but also, the trees themselves have been already monstrously derailed from their original course earlier in the poem. For, as the speaker describes himself in stanza 71 as being ‘an inverted tree’, this image of a tree’s branches growing below the ground monstrously rebounds nature’s course in the opposite direction from its natural, so to speak, path.<sup>31</sup> To follow this metaphor’s logic, the speaker’s ability to confer and be one with the natural world is a symptom not of his above-ground branches of a regular tree but instead through his downwardly growing roots, as per his inverted tree-growing image. As Brent Dawson suggests, trees in the metaphysical poetry of Marvell’s peers (in this case, George Herbert 1593-1633), ‘exhibit an ability to be content with uncertainty, to grow to “fruit or shade,” unlike the fretful speaker’s need to know his path.’<sup>32</sup>

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(1572-1631), likewise, finds man’s relationship to nature a source of weakness in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) in that he asks his readers ‘who would not think himself miserable to be put into the hands of Nature,’ for, to do so, Donne adds, is setting oneself ‘up as a mark for others to shoot at’. See, Shannon Kelley, ‘Amber, the Heliades, and the Poetics of Trauma in Marvell’s “The Nymph Complaining”’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 55.1 (2015), pp. 151-74, p. 151; Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2007), 1.2.30-1; and, John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (London, 1624; S.T.C. 7033a), pp. 286-7. For more on Donne in general and his *Devotions* in particular, see Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> In a similar manner to Marvell’s speaker of ‘Upon Appleton House’, the Welsh metaphysical poet George Herbert’s (1593-1633) ‘Affliction (1)’ (posthumously published in *The Temple* in 1633) offers up a similar plea: ‘I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree; / For sure then I should grow / To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust / Her household to me, and I should be just’. George Herbert, ‘Affliction (1)’, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 160, ll. 57-60.

<sup>30</sup> James Kuzner, ‘Metaphysical Freedom’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 74.4 (2013), pp. 465-92, p. 468.

Although Kuzner includes Milton in his study of the Metaphysical poets, there is no mention of Marvell in this article.

<sup>31</sup> The rebounding of nature’s course is discussed below in the poor lover’s ability to hold back the waves of the sea.

<sup>32</sup> Brent Dawson, ‘The Life of the Mind: George Herbert, Early Modern Meditation, and Materialist Cognition’, *English Literary History*, 86.4 (2019), pp. 895-918, p. 895.

On the other hand, Marvell's speaker is quite the opposite: that is, he is not worried whether he will grow to 'fruit or shade,' but is longing, instead, to become an 'inverted tree'. The monstrosity of the human's incorporation into the tree bleeds into its 'inverted' growing. At the same time, monstrosity is a consummation devoutly to be wished for by the speaker of 'Upon Appleton House'. In his 'encamped' state, it is an 'inverted tree' that protects him from the uncertainties and pain that is a universal fact of human life.

With the monstrosity of the inverted tree-man of 'Upon Appleton House' in mind, what if the unfortunate lover in the poem that bears that name is also not entirely human? Take the speaker's designation of his beloved as an amphibious creature seriously, and 'The Unfortunate Lover', too, emerges as a monstrous text that details the birth and circumstances of life for a non-human creature. Under this interpretive lens of the monstrous, 'The Unfortunate Lover' depicts the monstrous – transgressive – suffering of the poem's 'poor lover' (11). Breaking categories by a chaotic conflation of two diametrically opposed binaries, the suffering of 'The Unfortunate Lover' is premised in a surprisingly carnivalesque fashion. In the fourth stanza (immediately before the lines quoted above), the shipwrecked lover is presented by a personified 'Nature' with a 'masque of quarrelling elements, / A numerous fleet of cormorants black' (25-6). The suffering that the lover must endure at the beaks of the cormorants is framed as a 'masque' overseen by 'Nature'. The courtly approval of the masque form at the turn of the seventeenth century with James I's accession to the English throne in 1603 continued well into the Caroline period until the English Civil Wars erupted in 1642.<sup>33</sup> What is most significant is not so much the extent to which Marvell resurrects the *ancien regime*'s favoured form of entertainment; instead, it resembles the masque and the monstrous.

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, by virtue of Marvell's reference to the 'masque of quarrelling elements', Hirst and Zwicker point out that this has the potential to be a topical political reference in that the orphan of the hurricane's turmoil from birth is a veiled reference to the young duke of York, James Stuart (younger brother to the future Charles II). See Hirst and Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse', p. 379.



According to Mark Thornton Burnett, the ‘spectacle’ of beholding a monster secures a sense of ‘national superiority’ insofar as ‘to capture a “monster”’ was conducive to gaining greater knowledge as the ‘boundaries of the “known”’ are extended.<sup>34</sup> Expanding the purview of Burnett’s analysis of the spectacle’s ability to further ‘*national* superiority’, within ‘The Unfortunate Lover’, the spectacle of Nature’s masque suggests itself as the natural world’s attempt at gaining superiority over human boundaries of knowledge. In other words, the monstrous amphibian of life and death is the ‘fairground curiosity’ that Nature invites his spectators (cormorants) to gaze at and torture. However, the speaker’s beloved is not just a pathetic fallacy victim wherein he incorrectly – or narcissistically – projects his negative emotions onto the natural environment. As Leah Marcus has demonstrated, there needs to be a reconsideration of the so-called ‘endemic use’ of the pathetic fallacy in Marvell’s poetry. In her analysis of ‘The Garden’ and his Mower poems, Marcus stresses that Marvell does not merely rely upon the use of pathetic fallacy, ‘but an actual Adamic symbiosis [occurs] between the speaker and his environment’.<sup>35</sup> In ‘The Unfortunate Lover’, this symbiosis occurs not for the speaker but his beloved. What is more, the symbiosis that the unnamed poor lover attains with nature is located not just at the primal level of pain but also within nature’s attempts to endow its victim with life.

Indeed, the poor lover’s suffering carries with it an unusual ability to transgress the bounds of temporality. In the second stanza, after the pastoral preamble of the opening stanza, the poem, as already mentioned, precipitately lunges into the shipwreck that initiates the poor lover’s pain at the hands of the natural world. However, the very designation of the ‘poor lover’ – poor in the sense of being unfortunate as it ties in with the poem’s title – occurs even before his violent birth. ‘[E]re brought forth’ the lover was already ‘cast away’ four lines before the

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing ‘Monsters’*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Leah S. Marcus, ‘Erotics of Vitalism’, pp. 373, 378.

sea waves ‘split’ the lover’s mother ‘against the stone, / In a Caesarean section’ (11-12, 15-16). It is interesting to note how the temporal uncertainty wherein not only does the poor lover exist in utero but is also ‘poor’ in a proleptic fashion that foreshadows the horrible circumstances of his birth/mother’s death resonates with the temporally uncertain tone of early modern broadsides. A case in point is *The True Form and Shape of a Monstrous Chid, Which was Born in Stony Stratford* (1565), wherein William Elderton is baffled by the titular baby’s extreme deformities to such an extent that he wonders aloud how is it that ‘time can chop and change / Disguising works, in wills that be unsure’.<sup>36</sup> In both Elderton and Marvell’s texts, mutations in time breed strange mutations of humanity. Thus, the poor lover is unfortunate not just in the circumstances of his existence, he is also akin to Shakespeare’s Richard III in that he, too, is also ‘[c]heated’ – that is, deformed – in the womb by ‘dissembling nature’.<sup>37</sup>

Monstrous before the beginning of his life, the unfortunate lover is also monstrous via his suffering. As the third stanza provides a litany of the beloved’s grievances in the shipwreck’s aftermath, distinctions between human and non-human become blurred. Before examining this stanza of ‘The Unfortunate Lover’, it is helpful to consider, for comparison’s sake, the suffering of Marvell’s speaker in his ‘The Mower’s Song’. From the outset, the speaker imprints his negative emotions – in this case, his pining for Juliana – onto his surroundings for his ‘mind’, being as it is, the ‘true survey / Of all these meadows’, so it follows that in the poem’s refrain, ‘When Juliana came, and she / What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me’ (1-2, 5-6, 11-12, 17-18, 23-4, 29-30). The pathetic fallacy repetitively announces itself in the refrain. The rhyming couplet’s reoccurrence serves as a comforting formal balm that restores a sense of control despite the poem’s thematic content of the

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<sup>36</sup> William Elderton, *The True Fourme and Shape of a Monstrous Chylde/ Whiche Was Borne in Stony Stratford* (London, 1565; S.T.C. 7565), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 1.1.19. All references to Shakespeare are taken from this edition.

uncontrollable passions Juliana stirs in the speaker. Therefore, the meadows (unlike Juliana) obey the speaker's mental impression and suffer in accordance with him. This is not so much an Adamic *symbiosis* as it more likely resembles Adamic sovereignty in the form of natural science.<sup>38</sup> Sir Francis Bacon's seminal influence (1561-1626) looms large over the emerging field of experimental science as it became more positivist in nature during the mid-seventeenth century when Marvell was composing these poems. As such, as stated in his *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon's mission to restore our 'Adamic dominion over nature' resonates with the speaker of 'The Mower's Song' tyrannical grip over the grass.<sup>39</sup> The mower's sympathy with the vegetation is unidirectional – his suffering affects the grass, not the other way around – that chimes with the contemporary vogue for vitalist thinking in the medical discourse of the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup>

The third stanza of 'The Unfortunate Lover' offers conventional physiological reactions ('tears' and 'sighs') to the infliction of pain:

The sea lent him those bitter tears  
Which at his eyes he always wears;  
And from the winds the sighs he bore,  
Which through his surging breast do roar.  
(17-20)

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<sup>38</sup> For more on suffering and the natural world, see Chapter 2.

<sup>39</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding et al., 14 vols. (London: Longman, 1857-74), VIII, p. 410; Jacqueline L. Cowan, 'The Imagination's Arts: Poetry and Natural Philosophy in Bacon and Shakespeare', *Studies in Philology*, 113.1 (2016), pp. 132-62, p. 133.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, French philosopher Jean-François Senault's (1599-1672) medical treatise *The Use of Passions* (1649) is replete with references concerning the '*secret contagion*' of suffering. As he summarises, 'the pains of the Mistress [the soul], become the disease of the Slave [the body]' which suggests, according to Erin Sullivan, a 'clear persistence of hierarchy and separation' in that 'the soul is the mistress, the body the slave.'<sup>40</sup> However, Sullivan goes on to qualify this assessment by stating that the interactions of the 'different regions of the self' 'do not always do so in a predictable or transparent way.' Indeed, this ambiguity regarding the hierarchy of the spiritual (the mind/soul) over the flesh can even be glimpsed in Senault's formulation, insofar as the 'contagion' is 'secret' evokes the unmistakable tinge of mystery concerning the route of suffering from the mind to the body or vice versa, or both at the same time. See Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 71-2.

When it comes to the non-verbal responses to his torments, the poor lover exhibits signs of exceptionality. To designate the above lines as another instance of Marvell's 'endemic' use of the pathetic fallacy woefully fails to capture the nuance of the lover's relationship to his environment. John S. Garrison's analysis of 'Upon Appleton House' is germane to 'The Unfortunate Lover'. According to Garrison, the former speaker's fantasy of embedding himself within the natural world 'is embedded in the language itself: the chime of rhyme signals a desire for new forms of kinship and affinity.'<sup>41</sup> James Kuzner's analysis of Marvell's 'Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome' (1646) is equally applicable. The unintelligible Latin of the titular priest of 'Flecknoe', Kuzner contends, is evidence that 'the [Protestant] speaker portrays Flecknoe as *afflicted* with linguistic perversity'.<sup>42</sup> 'The Unfortunate Lover' locates this affliction not at the level of theological dispute (as is the case with the speaker's aversion to Flecknoe) but instead at the level of collective suffering between man and object.

Shuttling fluidly between the lover and tormentor, the lines above initiate resemblances of one (the lover) for the other (sea and wind), which complicate the ontological status of the lover (is he human or monster?) and the physiological origins of tears and sighs are monstrously displaced outside of the bounds of subjecthood. Further, the poor lover's link between nature is monstrous to the extent that the natural world's intimate relationship with humanity is usually presented in early modern culture as taking place between the feminine and nature. Indeed, Marvell's 'Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn' (c. 1650-51) is a typical example wherein the female speaker has such love for her pet and, by extension, nature that it is virtually impossible to disentangle the three as the imagined space of the garden 'reflects and responds

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<sup>41</sup> John S. Garrison, 'Eros and Objecthood in 'Upon Appleton House'', *Marvell Studies*, 4.3 (2019), pp. 1-27, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> James Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 132. Given Flecknoe's squalid surroundings, impenetrable Latin, and emaciated physical appearance, he, too, in a similar manner to the 'amphibium of life and death' of 'The Unfortunate Lover' is a monster who, in this case, is a victim of his bodily (and spiritual) defects.

to the nymph and her fawn'.<sup>43</sup> The poor lover's monstrosity is revealed in the extent to which he breaks the categories of gender. An excess of associations for the lover peeps through his manifold descriptions as 'orphan of the hurricane', 'amphibium of life and death' and, later in the poem, he is figured as being '[l]ike Ajax' (32, 40, 48). While all these colliding figurations of the lover are monstrous in themselves, there is a satiric edge to the third stanza's monstrous connotations.

In the identification of the poor lover as feminine with his weeping and sighing immediately after the shipwreck, Marvell appears to be critiquing the monstrous associations levelled against the female in the early modern period. A representative example is the Scottish Calvinist minister John Knox's publication *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558. Knox's 'blast' against the feminine rule of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I of England in the mid-sixteenth century becomes translated into the elemental 'roar' of the masculine/feminine, human/monstrous poor lover of Marvell's poem of the mid-seventeenth century. Rather than Knox's division between the 'monstrous' them (women) and 'natural' us (men), Marvell takes the monstrous to task upon the supposed passivity embodied within the etymological origins of the word suffering. While Hirst and Zwicker neatly divide 'The Unfortunate Lover' between the second half's self-fashioning of the lover as a mythological hero (Ajax), their description of the previous stanzas invokes feelings of 'passivity and complicity' can be subject to revision.<sup>44</sup>

As previously mentioned, it is useful to think beyond the limitations of the pathetic fallacy when considering the imbrication of non-human and the lover in Marvell's poem. In place of a unidirectional projection of the speaker's emotions onto the environment, the suffering that the lover experiences in his relation to the sea and wind posit his monstrous

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew C. Augustine, "'Lillies Without, Roses Within': Marvell's Poetics of Indeterminacy and 'The Nymph Complaining'", *Criticism*, 50.2 (2008), pp. 255-78, p. 265.

<sup>44</sup> Hirst and Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse', p. 377.

capabilities enable him/her to be understood in more distinctly non-human terms.<sup>45</sup> Initially, seas representing tears and wind signifying sighs may appear pedestrian tropes of tying one's emotions to the earth. However, upon closer inspection, the lover's pain monstrously exceeds its temporal bounds. First, the 'sea him lent those bitter tears / Which at his eyes he always wears'. The choice of the verb 'lent' injects agency to the sea and, crucially, suggests a cooperative exchange. Following this logic, the sea 'lending' connotes a positive or, at the very least, a neutral transaction between owner and recipient.

Moreover, the temporally bounded event of crying is superseded by an eternity, for 'he *always* wears' his tears. The inability of either the sea or the poor lover to mirror human suffering's affective responses proceeds into the following lines where the lover is transfigured anew into a leviathan-type beast whose 'sighs' 'do roar' with the 'winds' that shoot 'through his surging breast'. How can a sigh roar? Once again, the non-verbal expression of pain becomes monstrous. The barely discernible sigh that is the early modern lovestruck melancholic trademark becomes a deafening roar that completely erases any division between the poor lover and the wind.

What is more, this eradication of division between lover and environment also occurs between the wind and the sea. As the lover bears the sighs of the wind, Marvell describes the process as 'roaring' through his '*surging* breast'. In the reader's mind, immediately after the reference to the sea, this 'surging' mirrors not so much the poor lover's lung capacity but rather the sea's surging waves. The viscera (lungs) of the lover is extrapolated onto the movement of the natural elements. Co-operative verbs between the sea/wind and the lover suggest a beneficial exchange in that the environment morphs into the lover's tears and roaring sighs.

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<sup>45</sup> This reinterpretation of the limits of pathetic fallacy is indebted to Devin M. Garofalo's examination of the 'mercurial confluences between... human action and nonhuman agency.' See Garofalo, 'Victorian Lyric in the Anthropocene', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 47.4 (2019), pp. 753-83, esp. pp. 755-57.

Forms of expression have slipped away from the human and have been monstrously appropriated by the amphibious lover and his non-human colleagues.

If this is a poem that is about the transition between the ‘passive’ suffering victim of the poor lover in the first half to the confident, self-fashioning ‘Ajax’ of the second (as Hirst and Zwicker argue), the persistence of the monstrous throughout works against this redemptive reading. It is tempting to read how the lover becomes Ajax ‘braving’ – that is, facing danger with bravery – as a laudatory elevation of the beloved’s strength despite all his suffering that has plagued him since he was in his mother’s womb. However, in the seventh stanza, wherein the lover makes his ‘stand’ against the elements, the poem does not diminish the monstrous dynamics that lock the lover to his surroundings.

See how he nak’d and fierce does stand,  
Cuffing the thunder with one hand,  
While with the other he does lock,  
And grapple, with the stubborn rock:  
From which he with each wave rebounds,  
Torn into flames, and ragg’d with wounds,  
And all he ’says, a lover dressed  
In his own blood does relish best.  
(49-56)

Framed in the imperative mood, the speaker commands that the reader ‘See how’ the Ajax-lover accomplishes impossible feats of holding the thunder in one hand and the sea with the other. The reader is conscripted to imaginatively embark on a voyage to an unknown location and witness an unnamed lover accomplish unprecedented, indeed, monstrous tasks. Accordingly, the reader is implicated in this spectacle of monstrosity insofar as they are witnesses tasked with the difficult work of imagining the gargantuan strength of this faceless, nameless lover.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, this imaginative spectacle calls back to the previous

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<sup>46</sup> Bearing witness to the leviathan monster rebounding the waves, the reader’s imaginative experience chimes startlingly close to the song of the English explorers in Marvell’s ‘Bermudas’ (c. 1653). There, the pious sailors sing praise for God as he protects them from the ‘huge sea-monsters... That lift the deep upon their backs’ (9-10).

stanza's 'spectacle of blood' that 'angry heaven' cruelly witnesses as the lover is left to suffer (41-2). The seventh stanza's spectacle demands the reader's attention through the imperative mood implicated in this lust for blood (delivered in the final line). The reader is charged with the same crime of non-intervention that the speaker explicitly levels against the 'angry heaven'. Concurrently, the lover suffers from an unstable identity even as he is figured as Ajax. There are two classical figures of that name: one led a doomed enterprise against the gods while the other is a warrior who, upon his death, nourished the flowers.<sup>47</sup> Most importantly, it is the monstrosity that this unstable identity puts forth. More akin to the two-faced Janus or the multiple-headed Hydra, the lover's monstrosity persists into his supposedly triumphant self-fashioning.

'[N]aked and fierce', in 'his own blood' the lover 'does relish best.' Alongside the association of the leviathan's sea-defying strength, the lover is conjoined with the depravity of the New World cannibal. However, staying true to his monstrous image, the lover exceeds the cannibal's appetite in that he directs his destruction to himself. Indeed, while there are many historical/cultural records of humans eating other humans as well as myths of gods eating other gods, Marvell's poor lover is unique in that he 'does relish' in his 'own blood'.<sup>48</sup> Like the monster, the cannibal is, according to David Goldstein, 'a drama of boundaries'.<sup>49</sup> In the space of a stanza, the poem – carrying on with the imagery of the previous stanza – takes the simile of the lover as Ajax and transforms him into a leviathan sea-monster before finishing with a self-devouring cannibal. Applying Burnett's description of the monster as securing a sense of 'superiority' for the unmonstrous here, it becomes possible to see these lines as grappling

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<sup>47</sup> Hirst and Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse', p. 377.

<sup>48</sup> While it is impossible to list here the many historical, cultural, and artistic depictions of cannibalism among humans and gods, an overview of the early moderns' differing views on real and imagined cannibalism can be found at David B. Goldstein's chapter 'The cook and the cannibal: *Titus Andronicus* and New World Eating' in Goldstein, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 32-66.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.



(much like the lover grappling with the ‘stubborn rock’) between ideas of superiority and inferiority. ‘Cuffing’ sound (‘thunder’) with his hand, the reader should be in awe of the lover’s godlike control of the natural elements. Nevertheless, the image of ‘lover dressed / In his own blood does relish best’ takes the lover’s suffering away from its awe-inspiring mythological context to monstrously degrade it into something that reads like a recipe from a self-cannibal’s cookbook.

To ‘relish’ something primarily means to take or anticipate pleasure in the consumption of good food. Meanwhile, according to the *OED*, an alternative meaning for ‘relish’ is an embellishment of variable complexity based upon one or more trills [that is, musical notes].<sup>50</sup> Thus, the lover’s blood – that is, the visible sign of his suffering – is transformed by the speaker into musical notes. Upon the lover’s death in the final stanza, the speaker returns to this idea that suffering is musical by stating that the lover lives yet as ‘music within every ear’ (62). Therefore, the puzzling final image that imagines the heraldic banner of the lover as being the impossible juxtaposition of a ‘field sable’ (black) with ‘gules’ (red) can be explained by the category breaking of meaning-making that is enabled by the monstrous (64). Indeed, while Nigel Smith finds an echo of *Hamlet* (c. 1600) in the superimposition of red onto black, *Macbeth* (c. 1606) should be considered with its various instances of monstrosity as a viable candidate of Marvell’s allusive source, specifically, Macbeth’s fears that the blood on his hands (after murdering King Duncan) will the ‘multitudinous seas incarnadine [dye red], / Making the green one red (2.2.726-7).<sup>51</sup> The colours do not match – Marvell’s black to red against Macbeth’s green-to-red – but the poetic effect is just the same. The superimposition of one colour over the other is a monstrous impossibility. Without precedent, without explanation,

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<sup>50</sup> *OED* relish, n. 3.

<sup>51</sup> The acting troupe’s performance of the fall of Troy includes the melodramatic description of the Greek Pyrrhus waiting in the wooden horse ‘whose sable arms’ were ‘[b]lack as his purpose,’ and, in quick succession, his murderous spree colours him ‘[h]ead to foot’ in ‘total gules’ (2.2.374-5, 378-9). See also Nigel Smith, ed. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), p. 91, note 64.

without form, the suffering of the lover (or Macbeth's fear) cannot be contained within the private realm of their interior self. The poor lover, bereft of a name, is, in the end, unable to push back against the wave of death, whereas earlier, through his monstrous kinship with nature located in their collective suffering, he was more than capable to not only hold but 'rebound' – that is, turn back – the waves of the sea.

The death of the lover in the final stanza is a shock. Despite his suffering at birth and solitary life, the previous stanza's depiction of him as Ajax and sea monster suggests that his monstrous strength may gain immortality. Nevertheless, as with the lover's death leaving 'music within every year' and a heraldic banner for any lovestruck reader to brandish, there is, surprisingly, little or no critical comment on the fact that the lover's death 'leaves a perfume' (61). Written off as a topical comment on the suffering of King and country in the final days of the Civil War, the significance of the perfume has, by and large, not been smelled out, so to speak, by the critics. Perfume, by its very nature, signifies artifice.<sup>52</sup> It is deceit that is aimed at snuffing out the bestial. Even before the putrid smell occurs during decomposition, the body's natural smells remind us of our monstrous nature.<sup>53</sup> They are monstrous to the extent that humans are not wholly separate from and, by extension, superior to animals, instead, we, like them, are bestial and are therefore subject to the same process of decay.<sup>54</sup>

The clear-cut relationship between putrid smell and putrefaction is not only rejected by Marvell's poor lover but also reversed or, better still, 'rebounded' (to borrow from the poem's

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<sup>52</sup> See Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, *Andrew Marvell: Orphan of the Hurricane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 86.

<sup>53</sup> The influx of perfumed material into England during its colonial expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ensured the proliferation of olfactory references throughout Elizabethan and Jacobean literature. A brilliant overview of the importance of smell generally and of perfume in the literary output can be found at Danielle Nagler, 'Towards the Smell of Mortality: Shakespeare and Ideas of Smell 1588-1625', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 26.1 (1997), pp. 42-58.

<sup>54</sup> Compare Cassio's fear in Shakespeare's *Othello* (c. 1601-2): 'Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is *bestial*' (2.3.241-3). Emphasis added. Indeed, as Garrett Sullivan, Jr. points out, 'what troubles many early modern natural philosophers is that the powers associated' with 'animal life also exist in humans.' See Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment: Vitality from Spenser to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4 and *passim*.

terminology). Marvell monstrously transforms even death, the universal affliction that all living creatures must suffer. In accordance with the sentience afforded to the lover before its birth (as discussed), the lover's death is monstrous in its avoidance of the natural relationship between horrible smells and mortality. The jarring connection between perfume and death unleashes the culmination of the poor lover's monstrous suffering. The ambiguity of 'leaves a perfume *here*' conscripts the reader to figuratively breathe in and recognise the bestial nature embedded within all living creatures. In the final analysis, the monstrous suffering of the poor lover mars any attempt at categorical definition. Monstrosity is, by its definition, unnatural, timeless, impossible, unique, malformed. The unfortunate lover's suffering incorporates all these meanings to render the present argument's claim that he/it is a credible monster. As such, what has often perplexed critics reading this poem can be explained by Marvell's utilisation of the monstrous to describe the suffering of 'The Unfortunate Lover'.

The mysteries of the lover can be better explained with close analysis of the poem's title. On the one hand, to be 'unfortunate' is to be unlucky; bereft of good fortune; unblessed. At the same time, the etymological root of fortune is in the Latin *fortuna*. Often characterised as a blindfolded goddess, this mythological figure symbolises the arbitrariness that defines man's reaping of good and bad fortune. To be 'unfortunate', then, the poor lover, stripped of a name, cannot shine forth with any discernible personality of resistance. Therefore, 'in story *only*' means that the lover rules insofar as the fiction of his Ajax/sea-monster strength only exists in the potential of stories rather than the actions of reality. The lover is Fortuna because both it and the goddess are multiple images made up of uncertainty and chance. However, the lover's shifting identity transforms Fortuna's bifurcated image into a multiplication of different (Hydra-headed) forms of monstrous suffering.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the serious consideration of the monstrous in Marvell's poems 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' and 'The Unfortunate Lover'. For Marvell, the inadequacy behind the attempts to categorically define suffering as belonging to the body or soul on the one hand or the human and non-human on the other is resolved by a new hermeneutic lens of monstrous suffering. Ultimately, the poems' representation of suffering is located precisely at the soul and poor lover's ability to give (monstrous) shape to incorporate across the conceptual barriers between passive and active pain forms. The mystery of suffering – what are its origins? how do we adequately describe and overcome it? – becomes translated by Marvell into the unknown terrain afforded by monstrosity.

Monsters, like suffering, proliferate in unanticipated and unprecedented ways. Marvell's monstrous suffering turns the problem of phenomenological meditation into one of the rhetorical flourishes of the imperative mood and mutual discovery (between poet and reader). The 'see here' structure of both poems binds them into a discovery of the monstrous narrative. Just as the carnivalesque ringmaster invites the curious bystander to behold the monster, so, too, does Marvell poetically grasp for the reader to gaze upon his amphibious creations. Immune from conventional categories of meaning, the monstrous soul and poor lover are, however, not free from the feeling of pain. If in health, the regular categories of meaning-making are rendered useless, so is it with suffering. The shifting metaphors in the 'Dialogue' and the imbrication of human and the non-human to form expressions of pain underscore Marvell's desire to expand the human-centred understanding of suffering into the realm of the monster. In other words, the failure of human suffering to encompass the pain of the monsters is rendered into useable knowledge by Marvell. Such monstrous figures expand the conceptual

boundaries of suffering within the examined poems above, yet simultaneously, there lurk hidden monsters within Marvell's poetic productions across his career. These monsters make the reader confront the possibility that the divisions between human and monster can be erased through the power of suffering. What emerges in Marvell's poetry is an innovative theory of understanding suffering through the lens of monstrosity. The self-sustaining fiction of human exceptionalism is discredited by way of the amphibian nature of humankind, as expressed in the writings of Thomas Browne. Marvell, echoing Browne's sentiments, takes the amphibian nature of man to the extreme by suggesting that the human features can be marred to reveal the monstrous features underneath.

## Chapter 5

### Knowledge is Power?: Hunting as a Trope of Imagination in Margaret Cavendish's Poetry

This chapter explores a strategy within Margaret Cavendish's (1623-73) poetry that depicts the imagination through the suffering of animals that occurs in hunting. The comprehensive investigations into virtually every conceivable phenomenon as contained within Cavendish's diverse oeuvre of poetry and philosophical treatises lead her to claim that explanations for the creative process can be improved upon by incorporating the analogy of the hunt into discussions of the imagination. Employing the poem 'The Hunting of the Stag' from her collection *Poems and Fancies* (1653) as its test case, the following chapter proposes that Cavendish instrumentalizes the hunting of animals in her attempt to portray the unacknowledged relationship between the violence of hunting animals and the mental hunting that takes place as thoughts try to attach themselves to the brain.

By redirecting attention to the predatory relationship between one's thoughts and the mind, Cavendish dramatizes the encounter between an emerging thought and the imagination in a revolutionary new way. In other words, as will be shown in greater detail below, in her poetic experiments in and with thinking, Cavendish sets the vexing mysteries of the imagination against the unpredictable experience of hunting in the real world. Given the violence that typifies the successful hunting expedition, Cavendish's use of the hunting analogy to rethink the thinking process registers the creation of thoughts as a painful process. The chapter proceeds in the following fashion: the first section provides a contextual background of Cavendish and her position in philosophical circles and civil war politics in mid-seventeenth-century England. Alongside the detailing of Cavendish's (mis)fortune during the English Civil

Wars (1642-9), a parallel will be established between Cavendish's flight to continental Europe with her Royalist compatriots and the chapter's central theme of hunting. Indeed, analysing key speeches and poems written during the Civil War will show how politicians and poets alike saw the internecine struggle as akin to the barbarity of hound hunting. The second section focuses on Cavendish's use of the hunting trope to describe the imagination by focusing on her complementary hunting poems in her collection *Poems and Fancies* and some of her complementary theories in her contemporaneous collection of philosophical essays in *The World's Olio* (1655). This chapter proposes that what distinguishes Cavendish from her poetic and philosophical predecessors is her insistence on attaching the suffering that occurs when a pre-formed thought attaches to the brain to the situation of the hunt. Inverting conventional ideas (as articulated by Philip Sidney, for example) of the poet's skill in mastering their thoughts, Cavendish instead relentlessly depicts the absence of the poetic creator's mastery insofar as it is the seeking of the thoughts for the creator rather than the other way around. The benefit of looking at Cavendish's poetry and philosophy in relation to a single motif, that of hunting, brings to light her deconstruction of familiar binaries of human/animal, male/female, and, most importantly, pleasure/pain.

### **The English Civil War and the Hunting of the Royalists**

'To read the history of kings,' observed the eighteenth-century historian, Thomas Paine, one is 'almost inclined to suppose that government consisted of stag hunting.'<sup>1</sup> Edward Berry, in his study of early modern hunting, concurs, stating that 'every English monarch except Edward VI and Queen Mary hunted throughout his or her reign,' and that from 'the Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century in England, hunting was one of the most significant royal

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Boston: Thomas Hall, 1794), p. 244.

activities and manifestations of royal power.’<sup>2</sup> What is more, since the time of Homer’s *Odyssey* near the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, Western literature has been awash with heroic hunters who brandish their masculinity through the cost of their scars and the product of their prey’s corpses.<sup>3</sup> One of the central images of Jacobean society is Robert Peake’s painting *Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Sir John Harington* (1603). The prince – the eldest son of James I and the heir apparent – is depicted standing beside his horse with a greyhound in tow, sheathing his sword after falling a deer. Although the prince is full of promise as he is capable of such feats at only nine years of age, as it was to turn out, he was to die only nine years later of typhoid fever, and, therefore, the crown is inherited by his younger brother, Charles. Like the monarchy itself, the trope of the king as a heroic hunter was cut short in the reign of Charles I (1625-49).

In the final days of the Civil War, England is a place of predation where the victor (Republicans) stalks his prey (Royalists) not just in battle but also in its aftermath. The Puritan preacher Thomas Brook (1608-80), with Oliver Cromwell’s approval, at the beginning of 1649, urges the House of Commons to pounce upon their prey of the defeated and imprisoned King Charles I. Citing scripture, Brook conjures his audience to finish the war with the king’s execution: ‘The land cannot be cleansed of the blood shed therein, but by the blood of him [Charles] that shed it’.<sup>4</sup> Brook’s biblical reassurance that the captured king must be summarily dispatched to God – that is, Charles must be swiftly executed – belies the political expediency that directed the new regime to execute the head of their enemies – the head of church and state – as they beheaded Charles. If Brook appears optimistic with his conviction that Charles’s

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See Catherine Bates, *Masculinity and the Hunt: Wyatt to Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 1-43; and, *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, eds. Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Barry Coward, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Longman, 1991), p. 65.



death will ‘cleanse’ the land, that is, the in-fighting will stop when Charles’s head is chopped, the curious case of Payne Fisher (1616-93) substantiates Brook’s hypothesis. As a Royalist soldier, Fisher was present at the Battle of Marston Moor in July 1644. After finding himself on the losing side, he quickly converted to the Parliamentary cause. Despite this volta face, Fisher was to become poet laureate under Cromwell, and he was inspired to commemorate the battle in his hugely successful poem *Marston Moor* in 1650.

The Earl of Manchester, according to Fisher’s poem, is ‘[j]ust as a hunting Dog,’ well-versed with the territory who encircles his enemies like the hound finds ‘hidden Hares’.<sup>5</sup> Unwavering in his doggedness, Fisher’s depiction of the Earl of Manchester is in tandem with Fisher’s conversion from supporting the Royalists to the Cromwellian cause by the end of the 1640s. Indeed, as Victoria Moul observes, the simile of Manchester as a dog holds strong associations with the idea – inherited from Roman antiquity – that dogs by virtue of their ‘ability to sense what he cannot see,’ are ‘representatives of ‘progress’ and (therefore) their prey’ is the figuration of those who are left behind.<sup>6</sup> While Fisher’s simile aims to naturalise (in both senses as justifying and bringing closer to nature) the actions of Manchester and his fellow ‘hounds’, there is something of an explanation for Fisher’s conversion that resides within the hunting analogy. It locates progress in the surrender to the supposed forces of ‘progress’.

Moving beyond the local context of Fisher’s surrender to Cromwell in the battle and its aftermath, the broader implications of Fisher’s hunt motif is that the prey can admire their hunter. In affective terms, the suffering victim can still find pleasure in describing the skills of

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<sup>5</sup> Payne Fisher, *Marston Moor* (London, 1650; Wing F1029), pp. 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Moul, ‘Hunting with Hounds in Neo-Latin: The Reception of Grattius from Fracastoro to Vanière’, *Grattius: Hunting an Augustan Poet*, ed. Steven J. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 215-234, p. 229. Due to the relative scarcity of critical work on Fisher, he is the somewhat forgotten poet laureate who served under Cromwell. For more on *Marston Moor* and this poet, see Victoria Moul, ‘Revising the Siege of York: From Royalist to Cromwellian in Payne Fisher’s *Marston Moor*’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 31.3 (2016), pp. 311-31.

their tormentor. Rereading Cavendish's early works in the 1650s armed with this (hunter) train of thought, one finds that her varied body of works suggest her continuing obsession with the broader implications of the resonance between hunting and the human slaughterhouse thought itself. In other words, in a re-evaluation of Tom MacFaul's assertion that in the 'post-Cartesian world, the distinction between humans and animals became crucial and absolute,' Cavendish's poetry of the 1650s, on the other hand, long after the appearance of René Descartes's publication of his *Discourse on the Method* (1637), signifies the continuing continuity in English literature regarding the depiction of the intertwined and flexible relationship between humans and animals.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside Fisher, the philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), broadens this idea of the battlefield representing the hunt into an encompassing theory that presents daily life in similar terms. For Hobbes, our sociable inclinations must be fostered, for we are always standing on the brink of a world of fear and suspicion, one in which we feel threatened to reach out to others, for, to do so, one 'should but make himself a *prey* to others'.<sup>8</sup> The soldier's hunt for his enemies in Fisher resonates with Hobbes's construction of human nature. In other words, Hobbes extends Fisher's use of the hunting metaphor for trauma in the battlefield to include daily routines of life. For, as life is, in Hobbes's famous formulation from the *Leviathan* (1651), 'nasty, brutish, and short', it is no surprise to find him picturing interpersonal relationships as one of a zero-sum game insofar that one individual is 'prey to others' whether one fights and dies on the battlefield (as Fisher imagines it) or, according to Hobbes, when one walks in the streets.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Hobbes goes on to define the cancellation of civil bonds

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<sup>7</sup> Tom MacFaul, *Shakespeare and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 91. Cavendish, due to her exile to Paris, was intimately familiar with Descartes and Cartesian theory as it was initially disseminated throughout continental Europe. See Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 96-7, 119, 144, 190, 262-3.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

when one form of government supersedes into another: ‘All the citizens together retreat... into natural liberty, which is the liberty of the beasts.’ ‘This can happen in two ways’, Hobbes goes on, ‘either by permission, as when one gets leave and voluntarily departs’, or, as is the case with Cavendish and her royalist compatriots, ‘by command, as an *Exile*.’<sup>10</sup> For Cavendish, though, she modifies the hunting trope insofar that while it offers Fisher and Hobbes a useful metaphor to describe the potential for predatory actions in the social world, Cavendish takes this metaphor to address the nature of the mental world. In other words, in Cavendish’s hands, mental cognition constitutes an imaginary field of hunting wherein the act of writing itself is akin to the hunter’s desire for the elusive game of creativity – particularly the art of poetic craftsmanship. While Jay Stevenson argues that ‘Cavendish presented her mind and her writing as a demonstration of the potential for disorder she saw in the social and natural universe’, there is more than abundant evidence to suggest that the presence of the hunt metaphor in her writings to describe her mind, does not necessarily denote ‘disorder’ as Stevenson would have it. However, there is also potential in this hunting metaphor to impose a semblance of precision within her representation of the mind. To put it another way, by using the hunting metaphor to describe the mind’s relationship to its thoughts, Cavendish asks her reader to acknowledge how our ties to specific ideas resemble the precision of the hunter to catch his prey.<sup>11</sup>

Before discussing the significance of hunting in Cavendish’s poetry, it is essential to summarise her position in seventeenth-century culture. Cavendish’s innovation as a playwright, poet, woman of letters, and philosophical scientist and her dismissal as a serious thinker by her contemporaries cannot be overstated. Samuel Pepys’s (1633-1703) assessment of her to be ‘a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman’ when she attempted to join the (male)

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, eds. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII, p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Stevenson, ‘The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36.3 (1996), pp. 527-43, p. 541.

experimental scientists of the Royal Society in the 1660s certainly stuck, for she is instantly recognizable under the moniker of ‘Mad Madge’, while, at the same time, her reputation as a writer in her own right, suffers from neglect.<sup>12</sup> From her death in 1673 to the latter quarter of the twentieth century, Cavendish, despite her many accomplishments, was, by and large, forgotten by historical and literary critics. The extent to which Cavendish’s reputation has been restored since Pepys’s contempt can be found in her inclusion in the edited collection of essays *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (1989) as well as Paul Salsman’s magisterial study *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing* (2006) which frames his discussion of early modern authorship by drawing upon the works of Cavendish (particularly *Poems and Fancies* and *The World’s Olio*).<sup>13</sup> While it cannot be denied that there are many recent positive reappraisals of Cavendish’s life and work in recent years, in particular, critical readings that uphold her novel, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666), as a seminal piece of science fiction, there is ample room to suggest that a revisit to her early works is still necessary.<sup>14</sup>

Confident in her abilities to outflank philosophers both ancient and contemporary, Cavendish famously proclaims in *The Blazing World*’s preface:

though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be  
Margaret the First; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (9 vols.), eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Harper Collins, 1974), IX, p. 123; On Cavendish’s biographical details, see Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer, and Romantic* (London: Vintage, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> See *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen*, eds. Elspeth Graham et al (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); and Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> On the controversy surrounding Cavendish’s emergence as a canonical writer at the turn of the twenty-first century, see Lora Edmister Geriguis, ‘Transplanting the Duchess: Margaret Cavendish and the “Chronic Dilemmas” of Literary Anthology Construction’, *English Studies*, 98.8 (2017), pp. 897-916, esp. pp. 905-11. The choice of *Poems and Fancies* as the focus of this chapter is deliberate. As has been noted, even though there has been a recent upsurge in Cavendish criticism in recent years, this collection, however, has escaped scholarly attention. Due to its ‘bewildering variety,’ there has been a tendency to view Cavendish’s sole attempt at poetry as somewhat chaotic and flawed. There are, of course, exceptions, for a critical reappraisal of *Poems and Fancies* as well as an overview of the critical neglect this collection has hitherto suffered, see Jessie Hock, ‘Fanciful Poetics and Skeptical Epistemology in Margaret Cavendish’s *Poems and Fancies*’, *Studies in Philology*, 115.4 (2018), pp. 766-802, esp. pp. 766-68.

the world as Alexander and Caesar did... I have made a world of my own[.]<sup>15</sup>

Of all the historical leaders that ‘Margaret the First’ compares herself with, Charles II is the most noteworthy figure. Not only is Charles II the only person named who was still alive at the time of writing, but also, more crucially, Cavendish’s life intimately dovetails with her king’s. As part of her aristocratic upbringing and later marriage with William Cavendish (commander of the doomed Royalists at Marston Moor), Margaret was forced to live in exile alongside King Charles I’s widow (and Charles II’s mother), Henrietta Maria (1609-69) as her lady-in-waiting in France. At this time, Charles II was merely Charles Stuart, and he was forced to flee from his kingdom for fear of his life. The enduring (perhaps apocryphal) story of the young Charles narrowly escaping from the clutch of his pursuers by climbing an oak tree to hide while the Roundheads searched below emphasises how political life has become translated into a life-and-death game of hunting.

Given Cavendish’s proximity to such events – quite literally in that she accompanied the former Queen in exile – political readings of *Poems and Fancies* often fall on the same lines drawn up by the English Civil War. As Anne Elizabeth Carson points out, poets such as Cavendish began to invert the trope of the heroic hunter king by ‘transforming the “martyr” king into a stalked animal’. Namely, Charles is frequently depicted as a fugitive who is prey to the unrelenting hunters of Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan hounds.<sup>16</sup> Carson goes on to declare that with descriptions of the deer’s selfish pride in its reflection of its ‘stately Crown,’ in the ‘Crystal brook,’ that ‘Cavendish had Charles I in mind is obvious’ in her poem, ‘The Hunting of the Stag’. However, Carson soon moves towards qualifying this statement through her admission that the ‘liabilities’ of the deer are ‘(inferably Charles’s)’. In the space of a few lines,

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Cavendish, ‘To the Reader’, *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Elizabeth Carson, ‘The Hunted Stag and the Beheaded King’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 45.3 (2005), pp. 537-56, p. 538.

the opening flourish of Carson's argument – that is, the poem 'obviously' depicts Charles I as the hunted stag – is quickly relegated to (parenthetical) conjecture.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Carson readily admits that the poem's allegorical depiction of Charles as the wounded animal gives way to a broader philosophical picture of 'forgivable human weaknesses.'<sup>18</sup> That the hunted animal is a figuration of the English monarchy of the mid-seventeenth century has been regularly commented upon; by contrast, what follows is a reading of *Poems and Fancies* that reveals Cavendish's ability to adapt the vibrant atmosphere of nostalgia and suffering.<sup>19</sup> In other words, in the years following the Civil War, Cavendish emerges as a revolutionary poetic thinker to revitalise timeworn precepts of the imagination.<sup>20</sup>

### Cavendish's Prey of Thoughts

A decade before *The Blazing World* at the beginning of her writing career with the dual publications of *Poems and Fancies* and its companion volume of *Philosophical Fancies* in 1653, Cavendish first emerges as a distinctive thinker when it comes to the breath of her mastery of different genres, on the one hand, and the depth of her systematising philosophical theories, on the other. Before an analysis of 'The Hunting of the Stag' it is necessary to read 'The Prey of Thoughts' from the same volume (*Poems and Fancies*). With this poem,

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<sup>17</sup> Onno Oerlemans concurs, stating that: 'In the end, this poem ['The Hunting of the Stag'] is clearly about animals, protesting the cruelty of the hunt, while only obliquely an allegorical account of the death of Charles I.' See Oerlemans, 'The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Gray', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 20.2 (2013), pp. 296-317, p. 312.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 545-6.

<sup>19</sup> The physician Sir Theodore Mayerne (1573-1655), in his analysis of Cavendish and her husband, concluded that they 'suffered from melancholy and hypochondria, for which Mayerne noted, "the tymes"' that is, the Civil War, 'furnished "subiect Enough."' See Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> As Paul Salzman notes, *Poems and Fancies* 'contains a series of poetic moral discourses, so that, taken as a whole, the poetry offers a complete (and extremely ambitious) philosophical world-view.' See Salzman, *Reading*, p. 142.

Cavendish launches a rebuttal of the philosophy and theories about the mind that were proposed as far back as Plato (c. 428 - c. 348 BC). What do we mean when we say we are thinking? Is thought an act that is of the thinker's volition? The images that Plato grasps to distil the essence of thought ask more questions than it supplies answers. To find the apt metaphor to describe the thinking process, Plato enlists, in turn, 'the sting of a gadfly; the midwifing of a notion; paralysis induced by an electric ray; an inward conversation; a sudden, invisible wind.'<sup>21</sup> Plato's suggestions of pain inherent within the 'sting' or 'paralysis' of thought become lost in translation by the time of the early moderns' glorification of the forgetive – as in, the forging/creating – powers of thinking that are a staple of early modern theory and literature. Indeed, any reader of Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy* (written c. 1583; posthumously published 1595) is advised to disagree with Plato that 'Poesy' is 'far above man's wit', for 'Only the Poet', in Sidney's estimation, 'doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature... Her world is brazen, the Poets only deliver a golden.'<sup>22</sup> Sidney, *contra* Plato, elevates the status of poetic wit to be equal to God's power. The earthly 'brazen' world is forfeited in favour of the active imagination to deliver a 'golden' mental world. In Sidney, there is an attempt to separate the realms of mind and state of the world here, with the implicit belief that earthly life's realities are to be abandoned to gain a greater hold on one's inner resources.

Writing against the grain of early modern theorists' attempts to elevate the status of apprehension equivalent to the omniscience of the divine Creator, Cavendish pushes forward to diminish the grand, omnipotent scale of thoughts by putting them under a mental

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<sup>21</sup> Plato, cited in Scott Newstok, *How to Think Like Shakespeare: Lessons From A Renaissance Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry: Or, the Defence of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 107; Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry in Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), I, p. 156. For more on the evolution of early modern conceptions of the source of imagination in general and poetic creativity, see Rocío G. Sumillera, 'From Inspiration to Imagination: The Physiology of Poetry in Early Modernity', *Parergon*, 33.3 (2016), pp. 17-42.

microscope. As her poem's title intimates, 'The *Prey* of Thoughts' adds a new dimension of violence when conceiving of conception itself. In other words, animals' hunting is mapped onto the hunt of the brain by one's thoughts. In contrast to Sidney's project to utilise the imagination to fashion a new world either in poetry or in science, 'The Prey of Thoughts' stops in order to consider the frenzy and chaos that constitutes the array of motions within one's head.

If Thoughts be the Mind's Creatures, as some say,  
Like other Creatures they on each do Prey.  
Ambitious Thoughts, like to a Hawk; fly high,  
In Circles of Desires mount the Sky.  
...  
Suspicious Thoughts like Hounds do hunt about,  
To find the Hare, to eat of Timorous Doubt.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, 'Ambitious' thoughts still thrive for mastery in tandem with Sidney's motive for poetic creation, and yet, diverting from Sidney, Cavendish's thoughts are ambitious insofar as they resemble the actions of a hawk. Sidney's 'golden world' is substituted for Cavendish's predatory world. 'Thoughts', encompassing as it does all of the 'Mind's Creatures' – ideas, conceits, fancy, and its cognates – are transformed by Cavendish into hunting creatures under the standard of her hunting metaphor.

Essentially, Cavendish rewrites a central theory of Sir Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) in which he similarly employs hunting metaphors to describe the process of scientific inquiry. In Bacon's famous dictum, 'knowledge itself is power'.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, nature's relationship to man is predicated on the notion that power – that is, knowledge – is granted to one side (man) when he attempts to understand and control the other (Nature). What is more, this Baconian fusion of man and the natural world is one of violence and, complementing this, suffering. In Bacon's

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret Cavendish, 'The Prey of Thoughts', *Poems and Fancies* (London, 1653; Wing N869), p. 150, ll. 1-4, 21-2. Hereafter references to *Poems and Fancies* will be to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically within the text by line number.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, *VIV*, p. 79.



personifications, nature can be summarised as a shapeshifting entity. Therefore, for man to hold nature to a standstill requires ‘vexation of spirit’. This vexation amounts to the vexing or trying process that Nature must endure as it ‘turn[s] and transform[s] itself into strange shapes, passing from one change to another till it... returns at last to itself’ (VI, 726).<sup>25</sup> Not so much a form of cruel torture as Bacon’s detractors have labelled his form of experimental science. According to Peter Pesic’s defensive perspective, Bacon’s form of grappling with nature is a kind of wrestling wherein man’s attempt to know Nature results in a match or competition that ‘tries the seekers as much as they try him [Nature]; their struggle is mutual and has an appointed ending, after which force must cease.’<sup>26</sup> Rather than sweeping aside the history of Bacon’s ‘violent’ means of apprehending nature, Cavendish’s poetic project amplifies the vexing injuries of Bacon’s wrestling and transforms it into the live-or-die scenario of the hunt. Cavendish intensifies the vexation by using the hunt metaphor to focus on the inherent violence within the fantastical mind itself.

Consequently, as with the reversal of Bacon’s set-up – looking inward rather than out in the world – so, too, does Bacon’s metaphor become inverted by Cavendish in that she views human minds as being hunted by their thoughts just as Bacon pictured us as hunting down and grappling the natural world. Despite the deep divide in historical reputations: Bacon – the spiritual father of the Royal Society of mid-seventeenth-century London – and Cavendish are both writers who are united in their figuration of the process of gaining knowledge as a form

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<sup>25</sup> Bacon’s description of seeking knowledge over nature as a ‘vexing of spirit’ chimes with John Donne’s similar explanation in his tract *Biathanatos* (written in 1608; published posthumously) that to find an answer to a vexing question, ‘the best way to find truth’ means one has to ‘debate and vex’ the matter at hand. See Donne, *Selected Prose*, eds. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Pesic, ‘Wrestling with Proteus: Francis Bacon and the “Torture” of Nature’, *Isis*, 90.1 (1999), pp. 81-94, p. 87. The critical debates on what Bacon meant by the ‘vexations of art’ has engulfed historiography of the early modern period since at least the 1970s. Roughly speaking, Bacon scholars have split into two groups: the first group, led by Peter Pesic and Brian Vickers, who attempt to rehabilitate Bacon’s image, while, on the other hand, a group led by Carolyn Merchant seek to determine the darker sexual rape connotations that lie dormant under the rubric of (masculine) experimental science. For an overview of Baconian critical debates, see Carolyn Merchant, ‘Secrets of Nature: The Bacon Debates Revisited’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69.1 (2008), pp. 147-62.

of hunting. Take the example of the hawk. As was common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hunting manuals, the training of a hawk to catch its prey is referred to as the process of ‘manning’ the hawk. After all, George Turberville’s *Booke of Faulconrie* (1575) is cited by the *OED* as the first instance to employ the phrase ‘to make and man’ the feminine bird.<sup>27</sup> As Catherine Bates argues, ‘the gendering implicit in the English verb [‘to man’] proved irresistible to the sixteenth-century male mind and, as such, it quickly entered the language as an all too apt metaphor for the figuring of male-female relations.’<sup>28</sup> Thus, the ‘Ambitious’ Hawk is in tandem with the ‘hounds’ in their rigorous masculine pursuit to kill the ‘Timorous’ – that is, the timid or weak, which are conventional feminine traits as understood in this period.

Critical to answering this is Cavendish’s deference to Lucretian ideas of atomism at this point in her career. As noted by Stephen Greenblatt and Gerard Passanannte, there was a Lucretian ‘swerve’, to borrow Lucretius’s term regarding the widespread proliferation of his theories in Renaissance Europe.<sup>29</sup> Cavendish, at this point of her career, was not immune to this vogue for Lucretius. While Cavendish admits in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663) to have abandoned the ‘Opinion of Atoms’ – that is, the philosophical content of Lucretius – she never, according to Jessie Hock, ‘forswears the fanciful Lucretian epistemology’ and poetics that she first develops in *Poems and Fancies* a decade earlier.<sup>30</sup> Disregarding Lucretius’s philosophical dogmatism, Cavendish instead delights in appropriating his poetic meandering. In the death of one thought as it is caught and ultimately eaten by the other, Cavendish – following on from and expanding upon Lucretius – purges the

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<sup>27</sup> See Catherine Bates, *Masculinity and the Hunt*, pp. 145-73, esp. p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How The Renaissance Began* (New York: Norton, 2011); Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Jessie Hock, ‘Fanciful Poetics and Skeptical Epistemology’, p. 772.

fear of death exactly at the point where she dissolves the erroneous belief in immateriality.<sup>31</sup> Cavendish dismisses the need for humans to ‘turn Fancies and Imaginations, into Spirits’ by counterintuitively finding pleasure in the hunting metaphor that our thoughts are in danger of being torn apart by thought-eating thoughts.<sup>32</sup> The mock death that a hunter encounters in combat and physical scars are translated to the mock death of a dull or timorous thought.<sup>33</sup> The initiate is, according to Cavendish, able to embrace the vulnerability and suffering that is embodied within the hunt metaphor, for, in so doing – like ‘Margaret the First’ and her cohort of historical personages (Charles II, Henry V, Caesar) – the transience of life is superseded by membership into a heroic kinship that outlasts the vicissitudes of time.

For Cavendish, the ‘primary obstacle to women’s intellectual emancipation’, according to Yaakov Mascetti, ‘is not the natural inferiority of their brain’; instead, feminine cognition is ‘private, useless, remote, but what is most important, independent.’<sup>34</sup> What is most important, however, is not so much the extent to which feminine thoughts are free from masculine control per se, but rather, it is the extent to which thoughts – regardless of whether they are masculine or feminine – are subject to control in the sense that the transition from one thought to another is a painstaking process of one thought hunting and capturing another. Thus, the hunting metaphor grants Cavendish purchase on several fronts: the first is a critique of the gendered divisions between the ambitious male mind and timorous feminine mind. So far, reading the lines from ‘The Prey of Thoughts’ quoted above, the uninformed reader could be forgiven for surmising that it was composed by a man in keeping with the misogynist worldview of the times. Upon closer inspection, the text’s premise that the creaturely thoughts ‘on each do Prey’

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<sup>31</sup> This line of thought is indebted to Liza Blake. See Blake, ‘After Life in Margaret Cavendish’s Vitalist Posthumanism’, *Criticism*, 62.3 (2020), pp. 433-56, p. 442. Posthumanism is discussed through its applicability with the writings of John Milton in Chapter 6.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (London, 1668; Wing N851), Appendix 1.1. p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> On the idea of the ‘mock death’ for the hunter, see Catherine Bates, *Masculinity and the Hunt*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Yaakov A. Mascetti, ‘A “World of Noting, but Pure Wit”: Margaret Cavendish and the Gendering of the Imaginary’, *Partial Answers*, 6.1 (2008), pp. 1-31, p. 23.

project a positive valence upon the act of submission. Just as Fisher surrendered and converted to the Parliamentary cause, Charles Stuart surrendered his fate to the shelter of the oak tree, Cavendish's 'Timorous Doubt' surrenders – that is, is violently incorporated/digested – by the 'hounds' of 'Suspicious Thoughts'. The hunt metaphor, for Cavendish – more than any other Renaissance writer, regardless of gender – is an all too apt metaphor that encompasses the unpredictability and, crucially, the violence of thinking within the site of the mind. 'The Prey of Thoughts' incorporates the aristocratic daily routine of hunting animals into Lucretian theory of atomism to depict the volitional and violent thinking process. If the King and common criminal are privy to the same form of punishment on the public stage, then Cavendish imaginatively weaves a mental jungle where the thoughts of man and woman are subject to the same rules of survival in the dangerous game of hunting.

What is more, these poetic and philosophical descriptions of the mind as a hunting ground function as a justification for Cavendish's attempts at literary greatness. In the preface to her *Sociable Letters* (1664) – with its self-aggrandizing title 'Upon Her Excellency, the Authoress' – the reader is informed that 'This Lady only to her self Writes... For in her self so many Creatures be, / Like many Commonwealths, yet all agree.'<sup>35</sup> The endurance of the thoughts-as-Creatures trope even after the restoration of Charles I's son, Charles II, to the English throne in 1660, suggests it to be an integral feature of Cavendish's theories about the imagination as opposed to it being merely an expedient (political) tool with which to criticise the Interregnum of Cromwellian England. For instance, reading past the remark that although the authoress's mental 'Creatures be, / Like many Commonwealths,' with the gleeful addition that, unlike the turmoil and leaderless collapse of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell's

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, ed. James Fitzmaurice (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 10.

successor, his son Richard (1626-1712), ‘yet all [the Creatures] agree’, there remains, however, an implicit acknowledgement that all is not well in the mind’s Commonwealth.

Immediately following the preface’s giddy boast that the Commonwealths of her mind agree, Cavendish ponders whether ‘in all Heads doth not a Caesar Reign’ before the Duchess decrees:

But in her Brain doth Reason Govern well,  
Not any Thought ’gainst Reason doth Rebell,  
But doth Obey what Reason doth Command...  
And thus Her thoughts, the Creatures of her Mind,  
Do Travel through the World amongst Mankind,  
And then Return, and to the Mind do bring,  
All the Relations of each several thing[.]<sup>36</sup>

Here, Cavendish foregoes Sidney’s conception of the poetic creation of Golden World ex nihilo. Neither is there any room to suggest that we are witnessing a celebration of the feminine mind over men’s, for this only pertains to the author’s mind, ‘Her thoughts,’ and she does not ascribe this to her gender. Indeed, her ‘Creatures of the Mind’ are material, ‘its transactions are in the natural world’, to quote Stephen Hequembourg, for her Creatures report the ‘Relations of each several thing’. At the same time, extending Hequembourg’s reading, there is an implicit admission here that because ‘fancy itself is material,’ ‘it will inevitably be constrained to work with the matter at hand.’<sup>37</sup> With her Creatures roaming ‘through the World amongst Mankind,’ constraint exists in the form of its interaction with the environment and other personified thoughts as will be explored in greater depth below. Simultaneously, there is an unmistakable sense of discrepancy when it comes to the absolute control that Cavendish insists she holds over the ‘Creatures of her Mind,’ of the *Sociable Letters* in stark contrast to the Cavendish of *Poems and Fancies*. In the latter’s preface ‘To Naturall Philosophers’, Cavendish admits that

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Hequembourg, ‘The Poetics of Materialism in Cavendish and Milton’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 54.1 (2014), pp. 173-92, p. 180.

the following poems are ‘*Thoughts* which run wildly about’, going on to justify her chaotic format as simply because ‘*Errours* might better passe there [in poetry], then in *Prose*.’<sup>38</sup>

### **‘The Hunting of the Stag’: Perish the Thought**

As established by the previous section’s discussion of ‘The Prey of Thoughts’, Cavendish employs the analogy of the hunt to explicate her atomistic philosophy. In other words, Cavendish translates the abstract notion that thoughts exist through the invisible collision of atoms by way of the visible and ubiquitous practice of hunting for animals in the natural world. ‘The Hunting of the Stag’ does not merely provide another retelling of this theme presented by Cavendish within *Poems and Fancies*. Instead, this poem goes further than its predecessor in that it moves forward with this line of thinking to poetically experiment with the idea that thoughts are embroiled in a zero-sum game wherein the dull thought is forced to undergo the same pain as the captured animal.

‘The Hunting of the Stag’, on first reading, ostensibly portrays the titular stag’s utopian existence cut short when he is spotted by a human who ‘call’d his Dogs to hunt him’ and ‘At last it came to be a Forrest Chase’ (ll. 57-8). As Katie Whitaker rightly contends, ‘The Hunting of the Stag’, along with her other hunting poems within this volume, employs the point of view of the quarry (prey) in order to provide ‘passionate denunciations of human cruelty and pride.’<sup>39</sup> But what of the pride exhibited by the stag at the beginning of the poem? Carson, in part, contradicts Whitaker by describing how the myth of Narcissus ‘haunts Cavendish’s poem’

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<sup>38</sup> Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, unnumbered. The emphases are in the original.

<sup>39</sup> Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, p. 144.

since the 'deer exhibits limitations common to man.'<sup>40</sup> Conversely, the poem's opening lines suggest that Carson's point falls short.

There was a stag did in the forest lie,  
Whose neck was long, whose horns were branched up high.  
His haunch was broad, sides large, and back was long;  
His legs were nervous, and his joints were strong.  
His hair lay sleek and smooth; he was so fair,  
None in the Forrest might compare with him.  
(1-6)

The strength of these lines is that it foists a connection between the nature of thinking and the stag's physical condition without directly asserting it. Even as the final line quoted above notes the stag's singularity ('None... might compare with him'), the preceding lines serve to subsume differentiation under the weight of essentialism. The poem invites its reader to be intimately familiar with the stag's intimate body parts. The pleasure of gaining knowledge of this beast is reinscribed through the anaphoric 'His' of lines 3-5, suggesting as it does, a mimicry of an anatomical dissection wherein the surgeon enlightens his eager students. Just as the body in the medical laboratory suffered insofar that it has died, so, too, does Cavendish's lingering fascination with the imagined stag's body suggest a cognitive estrangement.

Consider the relevance of Drew Leder's theory of 'dys-appearance' to Cavendish's stag. According to Leder, we should not notice our bodies functioning insofar as the absence of pain or hindrances (dis)enables the body to be invisible to our consciousness. By contrast, bodily awareness is activated when normal functions 'dys-appear'. The body becomes prominent in our mind when it is in pain or when it is subject to the gaze of others. As Leder summarises: 'Whenever our body becomes an object of perception, even though it perceives itself, an element of distance is introduced.'<sup>41</sup> Leder's thesis pertains to the sense of alienation

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<sup>40</sup> Anne Elizabeth Carson, 'Hunted Stag and Beheaded King', p. 546.

<sup>41</sup> Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 77. A similar idea by Bill Brown is expounded in his 'Thing Theory' which is discussed in Chapter 6. The application of Leder's theory of

that occurs from one's own body. Cavendish's poetic project, on the other hand, takes this one step further. The stag's 'object-ness' in the opening lines of the speaker's pleasurable narration foreshadows the hunter's violent gaze and his hounds as it also draws attention to the dys-appearance's ability to transgress from the observable world into the imaginative world.

In other words, the cinematic control with which Cavendish pursues her elaborate descriptions of the stag's robust features is offset by the looseness with which a linear sense of temporality is maintained. For instance, the opening line – 'There was a stag did in the forest lie' – enacts a disturbing scene of prolepsis. Based on this line alone, the suffering of the stag is detached from any degree of temporal certainty. The past participle 'was' is at odds with the temporal flexibility within the deceptive word of 'lie'. Consequently, deception occurs at the levels of semantics (lie is defined as bearing a falsehood) and grammatical syntax in that for the stag to 'lie' down in the forest presupposes an action that occurs regularly. Thus, Cavendish emphasises the similarity between the reenactment of violence in the hunt maps the violent search (hunt) for the correct thoughts to re-enact this scene onto the conflict within our minds. The hindrances that the stag must physically endure before his encounter with the hounds, following the logic of Cavendish's hunting metaphor, cues the reader to see beyond the stag's surface beauty and look towards the analogical truth that figures the stag as a dull, 'Timorous' thought that must be superseded/digested by the forces of progress – that is, the hounds.

Cavendish's injection of (quite literal) friction between the stag and its environment occurs in the poem's description of how as he ambles along the forest:

... the Stag was hindered much,  
The bending Twigs his Horns would often catch.  
While on the tender Leaves, and Buds did browse,  
His Eyes were troubl'd with broken Boughs.

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'dys-appearance' to early modern literature is indebted to Alanna Skuse's discussion of prosthetic limbs in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1592). See Skuse, *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England: Altered Bodies and Contexts of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 81-108, esp. pp. 85-6.



Then strait He seeks this Labyrinth to unwind,  
But hard it was his first way out to find.  
(35-40)

The stag's hindrances in the forest are (with respect to Carson) not an allusion to Charles I, but rather symbolise universal 'forgivable human weaknesses'. Specifically, when read alongside the frequent use of the mind-as-garden metaphor in her works, the hunting of the stag appears to be Cavendish's attempt to puzzle through fundamental questions about nature's relationship with self-reflexive thinking. Far from the 'obvious' example of Charles I, then, the stag's hampered progress through the woods, and his distraction in his narcissistic gaze upon his reflection in the brook more closely resembles the inherent dangers attending the enterprise of unwinding the 'Labyrinth' that is consciousness. Consider, for comparison's sake, the above lines with Michel de Montaigne's (1533-92) admission in his essay 'Of Exercise or Practice' that his project of self-examination is:

a thorny and crabbed enterprise, and more than it makes shew of, to follow so strange and vagabond a path, as that of our spirit: to penetrate the shady, and enter the thicke covered depths of these internal winding cranks... And 'tis a new extraordinary amusing, that distracts us from the common occupation of the world.<sup>42</sup>

Nature, for Cavendish, much in the same vein as inwardness for Montaigne, has a mysterious power to hound, hamper, and distract one's progress or 'common occupation' in the world. For instance, in her next published work after *Poems and Fancies*, *The World's Olio* (1655) includes an 'allegories' section where Cavendish muses: 'The Mind is a Garden where all manner of Seeds be sown,' as she lists how 'Prosperities are the fine painted Tulips... Poppy is Stupidity; Sloth, and Ignorance are Weeds which serve for no use'. Alternatively: 'The Mind is like a Commonwealth, and the Thoughts as the Citizens therein'; 'The Head of Man is like a Wilderness, where Thoughts, as several Creatures, live therein' or, yet again, and most in

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<sup>42</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. John Florio (1603), 3 vols. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1910), II, p. 58.

tune with ‘The Hunting of the Stag’, Cavendish likens the brain to ‘a Forest, and the thoughts [are] Passengers that travel therein, making Inrodes and beating out Paths’.<sup>43</sup>

Accordingly, the stag’s failure to ‘beat out’ a path in the forest as his horns ‘catch’ the surrounding vegetation immediately calls to mind how Cartesian theories of immateriality ‘catch’ against the pain and suffering of corporeality. As distilled in *Discourse on the Method* (1637), Descartes concludes ‘that I was a substance, whose whole essence or nature was only in thinking, and which, in order to be, has no need of any place, nor is dependent upon any material thing’.<sup>44</sup> The inability to pinpoint when the stag’s suffering occurs – past, present, or future – appears to suggest that Cavendish – at this early stage of her career – is employing her poetic wit in a manner in which the stag exists only in her mind and does not necessarily have to follow the patterns set down by the stags in the real world. Even before he is hunted down and torn apart, the suffering of the stag supports the claim that Cavendish was already exhibiting skepticism towards her philosophical beliefs grounded in the immaterial machinations of atoms. While it is undoubtedly true that in her *Philosophical Letters* (1664) published a decade after ‘The Hunting of the Stag’, Cavendish confesses that while she attempted to create ‘fancies’ ‘of such pure and subtle substances... in my Poetical Works; but these substances, which I conceived in my fancy, were material, and had bodies... for I was never able to conceive a substance abstracted from all Matter, for even Fancy it self is material.’<sup>45</sup> Hence, ‘The Hunting of the Stag’ showcases the extent to which Cavendish resists being entirely enthralled by either the Lucretian philosophical or related Sidneyan poetic project of imagining thoughts themselves as being completely constituted by immateriality.

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<sup>43</sup> Cavendish, *The World’s Olio*, pp. 95, 97-100. In keeping with Lianne Habinek’s suggestion, that even though two years separate the publication of these texts, ‘there is evidence to suggest Cavendish composed the texts around the same time’, there is room, then, to interpret the hunting poems of the former as poetic seeds, so to speak, that is generative of the latter’s philosophical explorations of the mind. See Lianne Habinek, *The Subtle Knot: Early Modern English Literature and the Birth of Neuroscience* (Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018), p. 126. See also, Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 133-59 for the dating of these texts.

<sup>44</sup> René Descartes, *Discours de le Méthode: Texte et Commentaire*, ed. Étienne Gilson (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1947), p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* (London, 1664; S.T.C. N866), pp. 300-1.

The stag's reciprocal relationship with its environment is one of suffering. It is suffering in the sense that the stag's horns' catching the surrounding vegetation hampers his progress. The reader, like the stag, is duped into believing in the possibility that the stag's relationship with his environment is one of pleasure, not pain. More vividly than the plentiful food which the vegetation offers to satiate his appetite, Cavendish's description of the stag's horns as '*branched up high*' entraps the reader in the same manner that the stag is doomed to suffer his fate. The verb 'branched' is immediately reminiscent of the twig branches that surround the stag's horns. Suffering is temporarily extinguished here, for the binary categories of subject/object and human/nonhuman are rendered obsolete through the stag's 'branching' horns. However, as intimated by the 'catching' of the horns with the branches of the twigs, the incorporation between living and non-living matter does not eradicate feelings of pain and suffering.

Indeed, Cavendish reiterates nature's oppositional stance to the stag's intuitions when, during the chase, the stag decides to elude the hounds by jumping into a river.

Hoping the Dogs in water could not swim,  
But he's deceiv'd, the Dogs do enter in;  
Like fishes, try'd to swim in water low:  
But out alas, his Horns too high do shew.  
When Dogs were cover'd over Head, and Ears,  
No part is seen, only their Nose appears,  
The Stag, and River, like a Race did show,  
He striving still the swift River to out-go.  
(83-90)

It is at this moment – when the stag 'strives' to 'out-go' the current – that Cavendish's hunting metaphor sublimely captures the process of a thought becoming extinct. The blazon that began this poem (as discussed earlier) returns with a vengeance to seal the stag's doom for it is his physical presence, his showing 'Horns', that enables the hounds to follow him. Indeed, 'deceiv'd' is the critical verb here. According to the *OED*, the archaic meaning of 'deceived' is 'to ensnare', which is, of course, entirely fitting with the poem's content of the stag's chase,

but also, the deception can be understood as Cavendish's critique of immaterialism. Therefore, the stag's deception and consequential suffering is a satiric analogy aimed at Descartes's dualism. Using the model of the stag, Cavendish figures the Cartesian ideal of the immaterial mind as, on the surface (quite literally) as beautiful in that the poem's speaker praises the stag's physical features. However, in the water, Cavendish substitutes physical presence for immateriality as the stag's body cannot 'out-go' or overcome the power of the current. In other words, Descartes's dualism cannot withstand Cavendish's test precisely at the point where pain – epitomised as it is with the conflict in 'striving' – is the consequence of delusions of immateriality.

Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* continues this line of satire when she dismisses the immaterialists' notion that the mind sits in the brain 'like a Spider in the Cobweb... and that the Brain should get intelligence by the animal spirits as his servants, which run to and fro like Ants to inform it'.<sup>46</sup> Cavendish instils chaos with her eclectic mixing of animals and humans (the quoted analogy from *Philosophical Letters* rushes from spiders to (human?) servants to ants) notwithstanding, the violence that underpins the point remains. Whether it is the stag being chased by the hounds or the spider lying in the cobweb waiting for its victim, Cavendish consistently figures the relations between thoughts as one of impending pain.

Similarly, this event of hardship for the stag bears a theoretical likeness with French philosopher Alain Badiou's (1937-) theory of foundationalism as formulated in his *Being and Event* (1988) and, more crucially, with Jeffrey R. Wilson's recent application of Badiou's theory of 'tragic foundationalism' to early modern literature. According to Wilson, 'tragic foundationalism' is 'the decision to affirm one single idea as the basis of all knowledge and

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

experience involves ignorance and confusion and can lead to catastrophe'.<sup>47</sup> According to Badiou, an *event* is 'a rupture, break, disruption involving an occurrence thought to be outside the bounds of the situation'. The event 'becomes a *foundation* of knowledge, something singular that, because of its singularity, forces us to re-organize previous knowledge to include it in our set of things that are real.' The stag's event, that is, the hounds' entrance and subsequent chase, should force him to 're-organize previous knowledge'. In the stag's case, to overcome the event, he must realise that his horns are simultaneously the source of his singularity and downfall. However, the stag consistently holds a '*militant fidelity*' to the truth of his horns' former (singular) quality.<sup>48</sup> The stag ruins his attempt to escape by refusing to adapt and 're-organize' his escape strategy. Foundationalism is tragic for the stag because he fails to acknowledge the vulnerability – as opposed to the strength – that his singularity entails. The stag's singularity, his physical distinctiveness (his horns), while, at first, is cause for celebration, turns out to be his downfall. Firstly, as has been mentioned, at the outset, the brook 'mocks' the stag, replicating his image. However, the brook 'mocks' him as it scorns the stag's hopes for an escape to swim through it. The hounds, on the other hand, suffer no sense of disorientation; they are without fear. There is a terrifying openness with which they can travail without encumbrance through their surroundings, searching for a solitary goal – that of finding and killing the stag.

To turn now to the fate of the stag at the poem's end, facing the prospect that the stag cannot flee his pursuers, we are faced with his gradual realisation that he must face his enemies:

'Twas not for want of Courage he did run,  
But that an Army against One did come.  
Had he the Valour of bold Caesar stout,  
Must yield himself to them, or die no doubt...  
Single he was, his Horns were all his helps,  
To guard him from a Multitude of Whelps...

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<sup>47</sup> Jeffrey R. Wilson, 'Tragic Foundationalism', *Mosaic*, 52.4 (2019), pp. 91-108, p. 91. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Some bite, some bark, all ply him at the Bay,  
Where with his Horns he tosses some away.  
But Fate his thread had spun, so down did fall,  
Shedding some tears at his own Funeral.  
(125-8, 131-2, 137-40)

The persistence of the stag's suffering beyond the end of life is evident in the final couplet where after the stag's 'Fate' is 'spun,' the stag, nonetheless, can shed 'some tears at his own Funeral.' The stag's sorrow does not surcease with its demise.<sup>49</sup> Instead, in a kind of horrific afterlife, the stag is forced to bewep in attendance at its own funeral.<sup>50</sup> The injection of the strange notion that the stag's death will occasion a funeral does stay true to the poem's earlier hint that temporality is a notion that has run past its sell-by date via its reference to Caesar. Attentive to its temporal juxtapositions – that between the past as figured in Caesar and the future in the form of the stag's funeral – the poem ends where it began. In other words, despite the determinism behind the phrase 'Fate' is 'spun' goes against the uncertain nature of the stag's pain after its death. What conceptual understanding can yield any understanding of the entity's suffering after its supposed demise? This is the question Cavendish poses at the end of this poem.

Indeed, as the poem began with temporal confusion – 'There was a stag did in the forest lie' – so, too, does the atemporal nature of the stag's crying at its own funeral create a disturbing new assemblage of human and non-human convergence. While the stag's crying suggests its ability to appropriate the affective actions previously thought of as exclusively human, the

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<sup>49</sup> Cavendish reiterates this notion of atemporality in 'Allegory 39' from *The World's Olio*, she declares: 'The Mind is like a God... The Imaginations, Like Nature, that created all... Or the Mind is like an Infinite Nature, having no Dimension nor Extension; and the Thoughts are like Infinite Creatures therein'. The sentiment in *The World's Olio* is one of celebration, indeed, to the point of idolatrous worship, as the Mind is figured as God. While not confined by 'Dimension nor Extension', the stag is stripped of agency and relegated to a weeping spectator 'at his own Funeral.' The 'Infinite Creatures' of 'Thoughts' are not a peaceful society as depicted in *Blazing World*. Conversely, in 'The Hunting of the Stag', the 'Infinite Nature' of the stag is found in his endless suffering.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. The funeral of the deer that is imagined by Jacques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599). See *As You Like It* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 2.1.25-70.

stag's ability to bewep at its own funeral complicates this convergence of animal and human. More specifically, despite the poem's explicit identification as a male, the stag has, by virtue of its infinite weeping, more in common with the early modern notions of the female. In the cultural milieu of the aristocracy of mid-seventeenth-century England, crying was tantamount to transvestism in that the male had forfeited his masculinity.<sup>51</sup> However, Cavendish's stag does not merely provide a retelling of the myth of Niobe wherein the gratuitous weeping of the female transforms her into stone; instead, the afterlife of the stag fits with Cavendish's materialist writings that strips the suffering of death from fear. Thus, the devouring of the stag by the hounds enacts Cavendish's Lucretian theory that the joining of one atom with another atom figures forth a completely new combination. In the case of the stag, its violent incorporation – digestion – does not eradicate its existence. The poem then forgoes an accurate description of an imagined hunting of a stag that is predicated on the bounds of earthly life.

The stag's suffering is doubled in that its sorrow is not confined to its death but is compounded by an afterlife that is fashioned by crying – a feminine trait. According to Liza Blake, Cavendish takes poetic anthropomorphism to task for its equivalence of agency with the male human, then what are the implications for the stag's afterlife to be imagined as female and non-human?<sup>52</sup> Not at home as an animal, nor as a man, Cavendish's stag suffers not just at the level of its demise as detailed in the poem, but also at the level of a fixed sense of self. Rather than viewing 'The Hunting of the Stag' as Cavendish's ethical critique of the everyday ritual of hunting in aristocratic circles, the poem lends itself in conversation with her metaphoric connection of hunting and thinking as encapsulated in her poem 'The Prey of Thoughts'. Written during her fascination with Lucretian atomism, Cavendish latches onto the suffering of corporeal forms as a way of providing scepticism towards the dogmatism inherent

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<sup>51</sup> On early modern masculinity's aversion to crying, see Bernard Capp, "Jesus Wept' But Did The Englishman? Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern England", *Past and Present*, 224.1 (2014), pp. 75-108.

<sup>52</sup> Liza Blake, 'Margaret Cavendish's Vitalist Posthumanism', p. 449.

within Lucretius's philosophy. Speculative thinking and poetic creativity convalesce in Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* to imagine how pretensions towards an immortal mind – reflected in the stag's narcissism – must always fall – sink – when faced with the intrusions of nature. Simultaneously, the afterlife of the stag imagined as it is in conventionally feminine terms ('shed some tears') reimagines agency as not necessarily masculine. Rather than resembling Niobe, the stag only manages 'some' tears at the temporally bounded event of its 'funeral'. Whether or not the stag sheds an eternity of tears after witnessing its funeral is left to the reader's imagination. Thus, the ritualistic nature of imagining new forms as well as hunting for new animals is enacted. Cavendish's encouragement for the reader to think beyond the poem's conclusion alters how we think about the pain of thinking itself.

### **Conclusion: Power is Fancy**

As has been argued, Cavendish invokes the intimacy between the hunted creatures and thinking precisely to depict the nature of thinking. Cavendish's poetry mediates upon the profound fragility of thoughts – the ease with which one thought hunts and consumes another – and suggests how the hunting metaphor can lead to a heightened understanding of the consequences of exile and disorientation that can supersede her immediate historical context of the English Civil War and its aftermath. As Cavendish suggests with her 'Prey of Thoughts' and her writings and letters about her creative process, thinking, even in a relatively peaceful and undisturbed mindset, is fragmented and wracked with perpetually moving thoughts that seek to find and attach themselves to the consciousness. The ground upon which early modern poets and scientists built up the mind and its faculties to be one of harmony and powerful enough to outstrip that of God is undermined by Cavendish's innovative choice of the rhetoric of hunting to diminish the limitless panoply of the imagination to the figurative potential offered by the



creatures of the natural world. In this account, thoughts are not produced with any divine inspiration, but instead, we are the conduits of the semi-autonomous thoughts that search for their prey, that is, the brain. In Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies*, she fashions her beliefs about the cognitive system within the form and content of poetry. By staging the stag's foundational errors as it attempts to flee from the hounds, we are presented with the practical consequences of failing to acknowledge the environment as being a potential obstacle to one's progress.

Cavendish's line of thinking about the mind gestures towards the benefits of a sustained inquiry into the creature-like nature of the various thoughts that populate our heads. In her representations of her ideas and the feelings of animals in flight for their lives, Cavendish's writings suggest that imaginative transcendence is contingent on our recognition of the violence and destruction of nature as opposed to nature's profusion. Indeed, nature breeds chaos and order, so Cavendish conceives hunting as an invaluable tool for carrying out an analogical investigation method to present a new image of the mind not as a golden structure but as a dangerous hunting ground. Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* emerges as an elegant and innovative depiction of the hunting metaphor of knowledge that pictures our mental world as contingent upon the successful domination of one thought over another. Indeed, while Sidney represents the mind and its powers of imagination as capable of creating a new and better ('golden') world, for Cavendish, by contrast, what makes a fuller understanding of our thoughts possible is our capacity to explore the animal spirits within us.

Cavendish consistently points to animals' hunting practices and suffering to explore how our minds operate. Thus, it is not the empirical pretensions of the male scientists of the mid-seventeenth century that will reveal our nature; instead, it is by directing our attention to the animalistic wildness and chaos that is disorientating thoughts that crystallizes Cavendish's inversion of the (male) attempts to understand the mind up until that point. Cavendish's verse and philosophical writings suggest that we need to disturb the sense of control we believe we

hold over our thoughts to conjure up a new model of the mind. What we are left with, then, is chaotic – but, crucially, wild, and free – thoughts that dismiss our attempts to know where these thoughts originate, and yet, at the same time, it is this mystery that enables the capacity for creation when we embrace, or, more accurately, surrender to, the hunter that is fancy.

## Chapter 6

### ‘A living death’: Posthumanist Suffering in Milton

As described in detail in the first chapter of this study, John Foxe’s martyrs faced their execution with ‘inward joy and peace of conscience’.<sup>1</sup> Foxe’s mission is clear: refusing to recant their beliefs; the martyr faces his grisly death with the belief that he has, in Talal Asad’s phrase, ‘an uncoerced interiority that can withstand the force of institutional disciplines’.<sup>2</sup> Like Foxe, John Milton (1608-74) writes of the ability to maintain ‘inward joy’ despite external circumstances. Indeed, *Paradise Lost*’s (1667) fashioning of a ‘heaven of hell, a hell of heaven’ takes Foxe’s point to its logical extreme as the literal space of hell is mentally converted into heaven and vice versa by Satan’s defiant rejection of reality (1.255). However, unlike Foxe, Milton radically deviates from the salvific potential of maintaining ‘an uncoerced interiority’ that typifies discourses such as Foxe’s. The focus of this chapter is not to show how Milton approaches the idea that interiority can be coerced from without; instead, it is to explore Milton’s exposure of how the internal sovereignty of an individual can be a victim to its own forces of corruption. Just as the physical body can exceed or lack its regulatory rhythms (narcolepsy and insomnia, for example), Milton provides representations of interiority’s simultaneous ability to empower and evacuate the self. This chapter investigates key moments in Milton’s works where characters are ‘half dead’ either by exclusion based on the Lady’s gender in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) or as is reflected by Samson’s posthumanity in *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation in the title is taken from John Milton, *Samson Agonistes* in *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Books, 1998), l. 100. Subsequent references to Milton’s poetry will be to this edition and are indicated parenthetically within the text by line number, *Paradise Lost* is referred by book and line number; John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, eds. Stephen Reed Cattley and George Townshend, 8 vols (London: Seely and Burnside, 1839), VIII, p. 668.

<sup>2</sup> Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 91.

In what follows, I read Milton's *Masque* and *Samson Agonistes* to examine the latter's eponymous protagonist's claim that his is a life that is 'half dead, a living death' (100). Indeed, what Milton presents us within the 'living death' of Samson's continued existence following his symbolic death with the shearing of his hair (source of his superhuman strength), blinding, and imprisonment under his Philistine captors is a vision of what it would mean if life and death were enfolded together through the world-destroying capabilities of pain. While the genre of *Samson* and the motivation of Samson have been fiercely debated in critical circles over the past three centuries (more on this in the following sections), this chapter lingers on the agonistic afterlife that we are presented with in the supposed 'boring middle' of this closet drama. It is in Samson's utter failure even to fulfil his wish to yield to the involuntary somatic rhythms that support life that forces the reader to consider the possibilities of his *posthuman* existence. Representing inassimilable suffering that does not lead one to be closer to God – as is the case with Foxe's martyrs – Samson's 'living death' disrupts the progression from extreme hardship to eternal bliss. The relation between life and death is countenanced in *Samson* with an open-endedness that is shocking in its implications. More than just a dereliction of divine duties, Samson's 'living death' is evidence of Milton's negative reframing of core human beliefs pertaining to the separation of life and death. In framing this chapter's argument, *Samson* will be read alongside current posthumanist theories that help us develop the possibility that death does not necessarily have to be definitively defined as the teleological conclusion of biological life.

The first section begins with a close reading of the heroine, the Lady, in Milton's early *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634). I argue that a representation of feminine resistance to suffering uncovers a posthuman means of understanding suffering through Milton's unconventional representation. Moving beyond the critical tendency to read Milton's feminine exemplar of chastity and temperance as a veiled reflection of the author, the Lady

will instead be interpreted as a complex figure who simultaneously employs and challenges the legitimacy of the humanist educational tool of rote learning. Though oppressed by humanism's privileging of the masculine voice, the Lady nevertheless ostensibly supports the oppressive system of belief that is humanism. However, the Lady's allusion to Orpheus will be shown as a subtle critique of humanism by showing that the foundational linguistic strategies to overcome suffering are, to borrow a phrase from Erasmus (1469-1536), 'built on sand'.<sup>3</sup> The second section aims to construct a conceptual bridge between Milton's time and the posthuman critical lens that has flourished since the latter quarter of the twentieth century. To accomplish this, the posthumous executions of the Regicides at the beginning of the Restoration period are contextualised through Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano's efforts to locate the origins of posthumanist theory prior to the twentieth century. In other words, moving beyond the politically expedient reasons for the executions – belated as they may be, they still serve as a warning to the population – the events of 1660-61 will be perceived as a tangible manifestation of the posthuman theory of the encounter with the impossible. Simply put, rather than fixating on the ghastly spectacle of executing a corpse, the agency granted to the corpses of Oliver Cromwell, for example, paves the way for Milton to explore the intimacies between life and death. As will be clarified below, rather than having his characters reaffirm the strength of their convictions through suffering, for Milton, by contrast, suffering functions as the ground upon which his poetic personas harness their incapacities to such an extent that they provide models for living beings experiencing a premonition of death in real-time.

With Milton's early attempts at constructing forms of death-in-life established with the first section, the chapter's argument takes seriously Samson's self-understanding that he is entrapped within a type of existence known as a 'living death'. Following his earlier fascination

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<sup>3</sup> Erasmus quoted in Craig Dionne, *Posthuman Lear: Reading Shakespeare in the Anthropocene* (London: Punctum Books, 2016), p. 180.

with suffering's death-in-life qualities, Milton is, in *Samson*, once again preoccupied with poetically dissecting the overlap between life and death that the titular protagonist embodies. Moving from the critical tendency to foist moral judgements upon its protagonist, this reading of *Samson*, by contrast, is more concerned with the profound anxieties unleashed by the text's insistence on the possibility of an earthly afterlife. Paying particular attention to Samson's neglect in performing essential biological functions such as sleeping and registering the differences between light and darkness, Milton is representing an inversion of the principles that led to the executions of the dead following the Restoration. If Charles II demands that the dead should be afforded the privileges of the living by being executed, Milton poetically conceives of the world-destroying potential when the living are, in Samson's self-descriptions, entombed in 'moving graves' and are denied the 'privilege of death and burial' (SA 101, 104). Thus, Samson's rooting in a hostile world that always impinges and harms any claims that he owns an 'uncoerced interiority' lends itself to be read in the broader context of the shift from the redemptive project of humanism to the critique of humanist thought itself offered by posthumanism. The motivation for such a reading is to shed some light on how Samson's torments are self-inflicted insofar as his life is haunted with an intimacy with death that has become possible following the Stuart monarchy's descent in their assault of the dead. Thus, *Samson* is a tragedy that demands to be read as a powerful, painful reminder of the traces of violence inflicted on the peace of the grave following the Regicide executions, leading to a similar wounding to what it means to remain human. This conflation of darkness-in-light, light-in-darkness is the focus of this chapter's reading of the emergence of the posthuman in Samson's agony.

Ostensibly, the 'post-' prefix in posthumanism suggests a theory that has emerged after its predecessor of humanism that flourished in Western Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Indeed, posthumanist critical theory does not emerge until the late

twentieth and early twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the potential for posthuman theories to pursue their reach into earlier historical periods becomes readily apparent when we consider the full range of connotations of what it means to be *post*-human. Given the posthumanist wave in early modern literary studies, it is perhaps surprising that Milton has not featured as a sustained target for investigation. Although it is virtually impossible to provide a stable definition of what posthumanism entails as its branches are innumerable, the working definition of posthumanism for this chapter's purposes hails from Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano's recommendation that Renaissance posthumanists 'focus on *moments where Renaissance humanism seems to depart and differ from itself*.'<sup>4</sup> Following this definition, Campana and Maisano cite their contributors as following 'the lead of' Milton. The editors argue that works such as the aforementioned *Paradise Lost* 'agree with critical posthumanism' to the extent that Milton, in the same manner as his posthumanist descendants, rejects the idea of 'man as the measure of all things' to puncture the vaunted pretensions of the self-proclaimed "rational animal."<sup>5</sup> Despite the editors' praise of Milton as an early modern pioneer of posthumanist thinking, he is not afforded any sustained engagement in Campana and Maisano's essay collection. Conversely, Milton is relegated to a relatively sparse analysis of a single text (*Paradise Lost*) confined entirely within their introduction.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, this section argues that the affordances of posthumanist theory can be extended to early modern literary studies

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano, 'Introduction: Renaissance Posthumanism', in *Renaissance Posthumanism*, eds. Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), pp. 1-36, p. 11 (Emphasis in the original). For more examples of the recent trend towards posthumanist early modern readings, see Farrah Lehman Den, "'We Confound Knowledge With Knowledge': Posthumanism and Sensory Encounter in John Webster's *The White Devil*", *Cashiers Élisabéthains*, 80 (2011), pp. 35-46; the essays collected in *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, eds. Stefan Herbréchter and Ivan Callus (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Karen Raber, *Shakespeare and Posthumanist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The same must be said about posthumanist theorist Timothy Morton. Although in his definition of 'ecological thought' as 'a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings', Morton claims this concept only existed in post-Enlightenment modernity, he does, however, single out Milton as the exception in early modernity, achieving 'the ecological thought in form as well as content'. See Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 7, 23.

through a sustained analysis of the posthuman encounter of the impossible that occurred with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660.

### **The Collapse of Humanism in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle***

This chapter's examination of Milton's posthuman outlook on pain begins with the Lady's faithful obedience in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634). In other words, this section takes the *Masque's* heroine, the Lady, as a figure who inverts the technological advances of humanism. Specifically, the idea of a 'common language' in the Renaissance – achieved by the pedagogical practice of rote learning – becomes the cause rather than the cure for the Lady's isolation. After offering some brief context of the *Masque's* plot, the Lady's speech is read in conversation with Jean-François Lyotard's (1924-98) theory of posthuman suffering. The goal is not just to re-read a literary text through a philosopher or vice versa; it is to re-theorize a philosophical concept through a Miltonic intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Milton's *Masque* is an occasional piece commissioned by the Earl of Bridgewater as entertainment to celebrate his investiture as Lord Lieutenant of Wales. The *Masque* was first performed on 29 September 1634 at Ludlow Castle in Herefordshire. A family ensemble, the Earl's daughter, Alice Edgerton, performed as the Lady while her two brothers acted Elder and Younger Brother's roles, respectively. As the siblings try to make their way through the surrounding woods to their family home, they become lost and separated as the brothers leave the tired Lady to seek a way out. Thus, the Lady is assailed by the hybrid human/animal sorcerer known as Comus. Abducted and stolen away to Comus's stately palace, the Lady is entranced and can only vocally resist his sexual advances. The Orphic resonance of her speech has often been interpreted as an indication of the Lady's biographical projection of Milton

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<sup>7</sup> This idea of re-theorizing a philosophical concept through an earlier literary writer's intervention is indebted to Jeffrey R. Wilson's re-reading of Alain Badiou's theory of foundationalism through Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. See Jeffrey R. Wilson, 'Tragic Foundationalism', *Mosaic*, 52.4 (2019), pp. 91-108, esp. p. 91.



himself.<sup>8</sup> While such a reading is warranted, what escapes notice is the underlying violence that is embedded with the fate of Orpheus. This section reads the Orphic allusion as a kind of backhand critique of humanism in general and humanist tools of education. The weakness, or suffering, that the Lady points out here is that the technological artifact of ‘common language’ does not acknowledge her. The Lady’s attempts to express her pain resembles a compulsive coping mechanism, on the one hand, while, on the other, it appears as a disturbing failure on the Lady’s part to recognise her complacency in her misery.

Although Comus is inhuman and inhumane, there is no hint of suffering, whether it be his own pain or a desire to inflict misery on others. On the contrary, his antic (‘Puckish’) tetrameter pleases the ear alongside the harmony of the content insofar as ‘finny drove’ of ‘Sounds,’ and ‘Seas’ in unison ‘to the Moon in wavering Morris move,’ in turn, moves Blaine Greteman to come to Comus’s defence. Countering Stanley Fish’s claim that Comus is on the ‘opposite pole’ of virtue, Greteman proposes that Comus is redeemed through his ‘profoundly beautiful’ language (ll. 115-16).<sup>9</sup> The violence in *A Masque* comes from an unlikely source: the chaste and inviolable Lady herself. When she is temporarily physically entranced by Comus, the Lady refuses to remain silent and decides to ‘unlock[] [her] lips / In this unhallow’d air,’ in order to remedy her hitherto passive resistance to the magical seducer (756-7).

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<sup>8</sup> To suggest the *Masque*’s Lady is a partially veiled avatar for the author himself is in keeping with Milton’s moniker of ‘Lady’ that was bestowed upon him by his fellow students at Cambridge due to his effeminate appearance and cleanliness among other feminine features. In fact, Milton explicitly acknowledges this nickname in *Prohusion 6* which he delivered before his peers in 1628:

For from some of you I have recently been getting the title of Lady. And why do  
I seem to them to be so little of a man?... How I wish that their asininity could be shed  
as easily as my femininity!’

See John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 620.

<sup>9</sup> Blaine Greteman, “‘Perplex’t Paths’: Youth and Authority in Milton’s Mask’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 62.2 (2009), pp. 410-43, p. 427; Stanley Fish’s derogatory view of Comus as ‘opposite’ to virtue can be found at Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 157.

The Lady's threat appears to suggest that if Comus tries to transform her into a non-virgin or some human-animal hybrid, her 'rapt spirits' would protect her to such an extent

That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,  
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
Till all thy magic structures rear'd so high,  
Were shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false head.  
(794, 796-99)

It is interesting to note that these lines were not spoken at the first performance by Alice Edgerton. Added by the author later for its publication at the beginning of 1638, these lines would have appeared as shocking to its initial audience if they were to issue from a fifteen-year-old girl.<sup>10</sup> Milton's biographical linkage with the Lady is a moot point when one considers that the *Masque* remained anonymous until its inclusion into Milton's *Poems* in 1645. Rather than a subtle wink to those (few) in the know there is an implicit critique of humanism that nestles under the surface of these lines. The Lady's response to a potential future where she may be raped and simultaneously transformed into a chimera of the beast and human is to reach back to the shared humanist past of myth in the form of Orpheus. To promise her attacker that his 'magic structures' will be 'shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false head' is ironic both dramatically and situationally. It is ironic in the former sense because the audience knows that despite her claims to 'move the brute Earth', she will do no such thing and will, as the plot progresses, rely on the intervention of a benevolent spirit in the form of the watery nymph, Sabrina.

The Lady's lines are also situationally ironic, for the promise to 'shatter' Comus's magic is redoubled back onto her insofar as the 'common language' which she employs to defend her identity as a chaste woman is, in fact, self-shattering. The Lady's identity as a

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<sup>10</sup> As Nicholas McDowell points out, Milton's Lady is a 'complicated speaking part for the fifteen-year-old Alice Edgerton at a moment when objections to the participation of women in such entertainments had become a matter of cultural-political controversy'. See McDowell, *Poet of Revolution: The Making of John Milton* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 226.

woman is wounded not so much by Comus, but by the power of her own words. In a *Masque* populated by magic where language conjures realities, for the Lady to describe her feelings of a ‘raptness’ affecting her ‘spirits’, it works to strip her of agency when she needs it most. From its original Latin meaning of *raptus*, ‘rapt’ connotes feelings of being ‘carried away by force, abducted’ and, particularly in the context of a woman, *raptus* was the term for the legal charge that a victim of rape could bring against her attacker. John Guillory’s point that ‘a condition of arrest or paralysis is everywhere morally suspect in Milton’s poetry’ is compounded by the further evidence of suspicion that it is the Lady’s ‘spirits’ which is the target of the ‘rapt-ing’, to coin a phrase.<sup>11</sup> As Debora Shuger argues in her analysis of the Lady’s invocation to her ‘spirits’: “‘Spirit’ is a standard phallic euphemism.”<sup>12</sup> At this moment, the Lady is on the verge of being overpowered not by Comus, but rather, by the power of the illusion – or, instead, self-delusion – on the Lady’s part that her perilous situation has ignited a fullness in her hitherto elusive powers to ‘shake’ the ‘brute Earth’. The Lady’s open-ended promissory qualities of her speech (‘*would be*’, ‘*would lend*’, ‘*Till*’) suggest a future fulfillment of events that resonates with posthumanism’s and Christian messianic claims that the eradication of human embodiment – and pain – is imminent. Whether it is the innovative invention of artificial intelligence in which human pain is rendered obsolete, or, on the other hand, the second coming of Christ and the end of days as promised in the Bible, the narrative strategy is just the same: stick with our beliefs or suffer the consequences. In other words, the Lady, contrary to her exclusion to formal education because of her sex, must retain the illusion – humanism in this case – for the acceptable response to her impending suffering under the lecherous hands of Comus.

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<sup>11</sup> John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton and Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Debora Shuger, “‘Gums of Glutinous Heat’ and the Stream of Consciousness: The Theology of Milton’s *Maske*”, *Representations*, 60 (1997), pp. 1-21, p. 9.

The Lady's posthumanism – that is, her ability to stand apart and offer objective criticisms towards human systems of belief – shines through her implicit critique of the Orphic qualities of poetry. Lending the 'brute Earth' 'nerves' and shaking it to the power of one's words cannot help but stir in the reader's mind remembrances of the Orphic myth. The Lady's commitment to refuse the systems of belief enshrined in humanist pedagogy aligns with contemporary theologian Stanley Hauerwas's (1940-) theory that Christianity is a 'politics of death' with its central premises being the 'worship, celebration, and an acknowledgement of our [humanity's] vulnerability.'<sup>13</sup> Just as Christianity is bounded in the death (and resurrection) of Christ, so, too, is the Lady's exemplar of humanist imagination, Orpheus, associated with suffering a grisly end. The idea that rote learning will instil an automatic coping strategy for the student of Renaissance humanism takes for granted, as pointed out by Craig Dionne, 'that many forms of human behavior are motivated by biological conditions and evolutionary adaptations to begin with.'<sup>14</sup> However, the truth is that in the early modern period, women were not granted such a luxury.<sup>15</sup> With the Lady's resistance to her impending suffering framed as it is within the discourse of humanist pedagogy, Milton begs the question of how readers (as already mentioned, these lines were added after the *Masque's* performance) should understand the nature of the Lady's agency before the threat of rape.

The answer lies in the Lady's 'rapt spirits' yielding to the myth of Orpheus. In his *Prolusion VI* – an oration that Milton performed at Cambridge University – the young Milton

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley Hauerwas quoted in Jeremy Neill, 'Political Involvement and Religious Compromises: Some Thoughts on Hauerwas and Liberalism', *Political Theology*, 14.1 (2013), pp. 32-57, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Dionne, *Posthuman Lear*, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> The gendered connotations which depict feminine power as contained within, and usually frustrated by, the confines of humanist linguistic strategies are evident in literature prior to Milton. Reaching as far back as Elizabethan-Jacobean revenge tragedies, the Lady's linguistic revenge against Comus reiterates John Webster's (c. 1580- c. 1632) Vittoria in *The White Devil* (1612), who laments the dearth of relief women find in words: 'O woman's poor revenge / which dwells but in the tongue' (3.2.288-9). See John Webster, *The White Devil in English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, gen. ed. David Bevington (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2002). For more on a posthumanist reading of the failure of feminine language to secure revenge in *The White Devil*, see Farrah Lehman Den, "'We Confound Knowledge with Knowledge": Posthumanism and Sensory Encounter in John Webster's *The White Devil*', *Cashiers Élisabéthains*, 80 (2011), pp. 35-46.

asks for the forgiveness of his auditors, for, in cataloguing his knowledge of classical myths, he half-jests: ‘You see, O my hearers, how far I have been *rapt* and carried away by my excessively violent desire and yearning to please you.’<sup>16</sup> Note how in the same *Prohusion* where Milton gestures towards his moniker as the ‘Lady’ by his university friends, he employs the same word ‘rapt’ to explain his ‘violent desire’. Without reading the *Masque*’s Lady as a literary avatar for the author, however, a similar strain of violence binds both Milton and the Lady’s knowledge and application of humanist knowledge. The gift of humanist knowledge both wounds and heals. At the same time, the speaker of the *Prohusion* presents his ‘wound’ as a throwaway joke for the amusement of his student colleagues, the Lady of the *Masque* gestures to a more profound wound. Rejecting the notion that silence is the manifestation of feminine virtue, the Lady’s belief in her Orphic capabilities grants her membership to the polis: she is as good as any male in reaping the benefits of a classical education.

By claiming Orpheus’s abilities as her own, the Lady’s testimony reaches for a kind of honorary membership of said polis insofar as she claims the rare ability to lend agency to the ‘brute Earth’. Once we accept this proposition, that the Lady is somehow not only versed in classical knowledge but can also employ the life-giving powers of Orpheus, Milton tests the (gendered) limits of a humanist education. The juxtaposition of an exceptional new account of suffering – the Lady’s – with Orpheus falls flat insofar as the threat of violence remains. Just as Orpheus’s fate was to be torn apart by the frenzy of riotous female devotees of the sensual god Bacchus, so, too, is the Lady figuratively dismembered through her failure to substantiate her claims of Orphic powers. As the plot of the *Masque* progresses, it is the male voice of the benevolent Attendant Spirit who summons the watery nymph, Sabrina, which eventually results in the Lady’s rescue from the clutches of Comus.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 614. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> This reading of the Lady’s attempts to ‘move’ the ‘brute Earth’ as futile diverges from Sarah C.E. Ross’s recent investigation of the Lady’s earlier apostrophe to ‘Sweet Echo’ (ll. 229-42). Where Ross perceives Sabrina’s ascent as a delayed, almost surrogate ‘fulfilment’ of the Lady’s apostrophe to Echo, it is telling that

The above example of the Lady's fraught relationship to her words' power(lessness) illustrates Milton's heightening of the reader's discomfort. In trying to reconcile the particularity of the Lady's suffering – who else has been seduced by a supernatural sorcerer? – with her attempts to project a testimony that situates her at the head of communal (masculine) linguistic strategies to cope with pain, the Lady's allusion to Orpheus emphasizes rather than diminishes the impending threat of dismemberment that the Lady will suffer in Comus's lair. The Lady, unable or unwilling to understand her own conflicted status as a woman, latches onto the ideal of Orpheus. The epistemic injustice that the Lady suffers for the reason of her sex is then transvalued to the cruel injustice of Orpheus's case, where, despite his poetic powers to grant life to the lifeless, he could not defend himself against the Bacchic rioters from tearing him apart.

Ultimately, the silence of the 'brute Earth' to the Lady's pleas to relieve her torments serves to implicate humanism's complicity in denying the epistemic power of the feminine voice.<sup>18</sup> What follows below is a further examination of Milton's posthumanist credentials pertaining to his representation of Samson's persistence of life after death in his late tragic poem. *Samson Agonistes*, it will be argued, invites readers to participate in an imaginative clinic that experiments with and exposes new avenues of thought when considering the binaries between life/agency and death/inanimation. Before a close reading of Milton's closet drama,

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she describes Comus's response to her words as being 'ravished'. The gendered connotations of 'rapt' discussed above are here flipped, and yet, despite the Lady's ability to 'move' Comus, textual evidence of the *Masque* does not necessarily bear out Ross's reading. See Sarah C.E. Ross, 'Complaint's Echoes' in *Early Modern Women's Complaint: Gender, Form, and Politics*, eds. Sarah C.E. Ross and Rosalind Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 183-203, esp. pp. 189-90

<sup>18</sup> I am indebted here to Mary Janell Metzger's ground-breaking idea of 'epistemic injustice' in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Lucrece's objectification of her pain by reference to Hecuba follows very closely the heroine of Milton's *Masque* alluding to Orpheus. The difference being that while the shared suffering of Hecuba and Lucrece is made explicit, the Lady's affinity with Orpheus is more subtle and requires the reader to recall Orpheus's fate. See Mary Janell Metzger, 'Epistemic Injustice and *The Rape of Lucrece*', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 49.2 (2016), pp. 19-34, esp. pp. 27-8.

the next section will serve as a contextual bridge to move us from the Caroline *Masque* of Milton's youth to the publication of Milton's volume in 1671 during the Restoration of Charles II. Published in the volume entitled *Paradise Regained, to which is added, Samson Agonistes*, the latter text is described by the author on its title page as a 'dramatic poem'. Resistance is the unifying theme of these texts insofar as *Paradise Regained* details Jesus's peaceful rebuke of Satan's temptations in the forest whereas *Samson* is a tragedy that describes the failure of Samson to resist his imprisonment at the hands of the Philistines. The various designations critics have assigned to *Samson* – tragedy, tragic poem, a dramatic poem, closet drama – attest to its self-cancelling properties. A play that is not to be played on the stage, an adaptation of the Old Testament story of Samson from the book of Judges following *Paradise Regained's* New Testament retelling of Jesus Christ's temptations by Satan, all these factors suggest that Milton, even in his last published work, cultivates epistemological weakness as an immanent feature of his poetic vocation.<sup>19</sup>

Nearly one hundred years after its first publication, John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1570) was resurrected to the public's mind in 1660-61 as the regicides such as Major-General Harrison faced the executioner's block. As Foxe's martyrs faced their final grisly moments with 'inward joy', so, too, did Harrison 'with a cheerful smile' die for the Good Old Cause of English Republicanism and was happy, not fearful that he was 'going to seal' the power of his convictions with his painful death.<sup>20</sup> The paradox here may be difficult but not impossible to explain. In the same manner as Foxe's martyrs representing the foundational Christ-like figures of the Protestant establishment, the English Republic is justified by the heroic stance of its

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<sup>19</sup> On the sequencing of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* in the 1671 volume, see Patrick J. McGrath, 'Typology, Politics, and Theology in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*', *Studies in Philology*, 116.4 (2019), pp. 758-83.

<sup>20</sup> *The Speeches and Prayers of Major General Harrison* (London, 1660; Wing S4874B), pp. 6-7. On the executions of the regicides and its political implications for Milton's composition of *Samson*, see Laura Lunger Knoppers, *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 42-66.

heroes as they pay the price for the Republic's defeat with their lives. Although politically at odds, the religious neighbours (Elizabethan Calvinists and Cromwellian Puritans) perceive extreme suffering as a necessary step towards a good death when faced with institutional persecution. Foxe's martyrs and Harrison's narratives participate in the broader cultural strategy known as the *ars moriendi* tradition. The *ars moriendi* ('art of dying well') tradition is a genre that aims to justify how the suffering that usually accompanies the individual's final moments should be met without complaint for the afterlife will be one of eternal bliss. Ever-expanding its purview, the 'art of dying' manuals had, as Henry R. McAdoo has demonstrated, become 'arts of living' by the Caroline period in that the Christian was instructed to 'ever be in a state of preparedness'.<sup>21</sup> It is never too early to repent for one's sins, and so it follows that death is merely the final stage in ceaseless labour of 'preparedness'.

Nobody in the seventeenth century was as much a model of the 'good death' as Charles I.<sup>22</sup> With the public execution of God's anointed on earth, the bounds between the realm of the divine and the profane were swiftly cut. With Charles's son's restoration to the throne in May 1660, revenge on those who committed the regicide was one of the new King's priorities. However, revenge was belated because Cromwell had died two years prior to his 'execution'. To overcome this obstacle, the King temporarily bestowed agency to the corpses of the deceased regicides. Prosopopoeia – the figure of speech in which a dead person or thing is represented as speaking – is extracted by Charles II from the realm of the impossible into the

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<sup>21</sup> Henry McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 136. For more on the genesis and proliferation of the *ars moriendi* tradition in early modern England, see David William Atkinson *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4, the supposedly self-authored *Eikon Basilike* by Charles I, is now supposed to have been written by Exeter clergyman, John Gauden (1605-62). Whether Charles's authorship is authentic or not is irrelevant insofar that the executed king's (self-)depiction as 'dying well' in the manner of Christ was hugely successful. Indeed, to counter the ex-king's posthumous sympathy among the English populace, Milton composed what David Loewenstein describes as an 'anti-theatrical response' in the form of *Eikonoklastes* (1649). Countering Charles's Christlike pretensions, Milton instead depicts him as a perverted kind of playwright 'stage-managing the fifth act of his life with the same hypocrisy that characterized his reign.' See David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 58; Dennis Kezar, 'Samson's Death by Theater and Milton's Art of Dying', *English Literary History*, 66.2 (1999), pp. 295-336, p. 313.



punitive world of political punishment. Although posthumous executions were not the invention of Charles II, the ‘ghastly souvenir’ of Cromwell’s head, according to Kevin Belmonte (Cromwell’s head was passed down from owner to owner in the following centuries), reveals the unintended consequences of granting agency to dead matter.<sup>23</sup> The afterlife of Cromwell’s head – that is, the agency his supporters continued to afford their fallen leader after his death – cannot fail to evoke the latent threat as expressed by Paul de Man: ‘namely that by making the dea[d] speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death.’<sup>24</sup>

Cromwell and his deceased comrades’ posthumous executions is the culmination of the apocalyptic events that followed in the immediate aftermath of the English Civil Wars. The Royalists’ problematic attempt to extend suffering beyond life and into the grave forces us to consider how pain is, in part, a matter of aesthetics. Rather than acknowledging that death cancels the body’s ability to feel, the spectacle of torturing corpses resonates with the playwright’s art. Just as the Chorus in Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (1599) pleads for the audience to ‘piece out our imperfections with your thoughts’, so, too, does Charles II implicitly suggest that the onus is on the witnesses of the posthumous executions to imagine suffering where there is none.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when the corpse’s limbs are chopped off, the observer’s imagination must hear the screams. Figurative suffering trumps the literal. Such a configuration of suffering is on display in Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*. In defamiliarizing the progressive schema of pain as represented by Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, Milton’s *Samson* portrays pain’s self-generative nature. Indeed, while Dennis Kezar points out, ‘this self-consuming drama [*Samson Agonistes*] recapitulates a drama of construction and deconstruction that an audience in 1671 would have

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<sup>23</sup> Kevin Belmonte, *John Bunyan* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67-82, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), Prologue, line 23. All references to Shakespeare are from this edition.

recognized as recent history’, Kezar is primarily concerned with the ‘construction and deconstruction’ that can be found in *Samson*’s affinities with the *ars moriendi* tradition.<sup>26</sup>

The following section focuses on how the recent history of the regicides’ posthumous executions provides Milton with the resources to imagine the power of suffering to preserve the dead from dying. As such, the following discussion aims to demonstrate how Milton’s representation of Samson as not exactly human casts his pain as a further reflection of Samson’s growing awareness that his death has a life independent of his actual demise. Following close readings of Samson’s articulations of his suffering, the chapter concludes by positing how the absence of any danger, including death in Samson’s modified superhuman existence, means Samson is deprived of the knowledge that suffering serves any redemptive purpose.

#### **‘O mirror of our fickle state’: Posthumanity and Suffering in *Samson Agonistes***

Violent self-cancellation pervades Milton’s life and the English nation’s life from the middle of the seventeenth century. By the time Milton published *Samson Agonistes* in 1671, his personal complaints are comparable to the biblical book of Job. Although, as a poet, Milton was capable of imaginatively seeing things that others could not, since 1652, Milton was completely blind. In a letter dated 28 September 1654, Milton details how it was ten years ago since he first noticed his ‘sight becoming weak and growing dim, and at the same time my spleen and all my viscera burdened and shaken with flatulence.’<sup>27</sup> Dating the beginning of his decline to 1644, Milton’s letter testifies that his body – like England during this period – is at war with itself. Self-cancellation also permeates the beginning of the restored Stuart monarchy in the form of the Act of Oblivion formalized by Charles II. Referring to 1660 as ‘the twelfth year of our reign’, the intervening decade of Republican rule during the 1650s was abolished

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<sup>26</sup> Dennis Kezar, ‘Milton’s Art of Dying’, p. 327.

<sup>27</sup> John Milton, Letter to Leonard Philaras, 28 September 1654 in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 780.

from public memory. An institutionalised form of selective memory was necessary for ‘all notes of discord... [are to] be utterly abolished among all our subjects’. Once again, in this auspicious year of 1660, the royal authorities impose impossible sanctions. The willful self-destruction of memory, the plucking from the memory of rooted sorrows, to paraphrase Macbeth, essentially means that the individual’s human brain has become weaponized. Despite his physical privations during the Restoration, Milton was not prepared to allow outside forces to dictate the level of control he may have over his mind. Milton was more than prepared to explore the weakness – that is, the self-cancelling properties – of his brain on his own terms within his art.

This proximity of self-cancellation and Milton’s art begins this chapter’s discussion of *Samson*. Much critical debate has been targeted at resolving the generic debate that is bounded up with this text.<sup>28</sup> For example, Ross Lerner’s theory that Milton’s early poem ‘Lycidas’ (1638) is ‘concerned with poetic vocation, with the capacity for refiguration that the poem simultaneously suffers, enacts, and celebrates’, is extended to this chapter’s examination of *Samson*.<sup>29</sup> Samson’s utter failure to overcome his wish to yield to the involuntary somatic rhythms that support life that forces a reconsideration of the nature of Samson’s existence during his imprisonment. Representing suffering that is unknowable in the sense that its redemptive purpose is unclear at best – unlike the case with Foxe’s martyrs – Samson’s ‘living death’ disrupts the progression from extreme hardship to eternal bliss.

‘[C]hief of all’ complaints, according to Samson, is his ‘loss of sight,’ wherein he is:

Inferior to the vilest now become  
Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me,  
They creep, yet see; *I dark in light* expos’d  
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,

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<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the critical disputes surrounding *Samson*’s genre, see Alan Rudrum, ‘Milton Scholarship and the *Agon* over *Samson Agonistes*’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65.3-4 (2002), pp. 465-88.

<sup>29</sup> Ross Lerner, ‘Weak Milton’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 57.1 (2017), pp. 111-34, p. 128.

Within doors, or without, still as a fool,  
In power of others, never in my own;  
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
(SA ll. 73-9; emphasis added)

The posthumanism in these lines is evident in the inversion of the Great Chain of Being that was a staple of the medieval and early modern worldviews ('the vilest here excel me').<sup>30</sup> To 'now become' 'the vilest... Of man or worm' registers as an admission, on Samson's part, that he is at the farthest pole from his quasi-divine status as a Nazarite – that is, God's chosen one to free the Israelites from the Philistine yoke of tyranny. More than this, humanity ('man') and animality ('worm') are in competition with each other to see which of the two is the 'vilest'.

The potential for the 'or' in 'Of man *or* worm' to be read as a correlative construction wherein the 'or' highlights the indifference between the two, reveals the extent of Samson's negative version of his posthumanity. At the same time, the openness between the human/animal is celebrated by posthumanist theorists. For example, often cited as a formative influence on contemporary posthuman theory, Donna Haraway celebrates this openness in which 'people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines,' nor are they 'afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Samson embodies a nightmarish existence of 'partial identities' where he is accounted from 'contradictory standpoints' as a demi-god, a warrior, a philanderer, and, viler than a worm. With his talk of worms, Samson reveals how the manna sent from heaven has spoiled and will soon be food for worms. Indeed, in anticipation of the unimaginable reality of the final line

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<sup>30</sup> The comprehensive studies of the Great Chain of Being remain E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943); and Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); and Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), esp. pp. 83-108. For recent anti-foundationalist views that 'challenges, in some way or other... the core commitments' (p. 3) of the Great Chain of Being as it evolved from the medieval to modern times, see the essays gathered in *Reality and Its Structure: Essays in Fundamentality*, eds. Ricki Bliss and Graham Priest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 15.

wherein Samson is ‘dead more than half’, the line ‘the vilest here excel me’ hints at the self-generation of pain that pervades Samson’s condition. The ‘vilest *here* excel me,’ following his mentioning of the ‘worm’, the ‘here’ can be read as a proleptic vision of the worms of the grave. While it may be an imaginative leap to suggest that the excessive violence done upon the corpse may be read as Milton’s tribute to his fallen (and dug up) former Republican colleagues, it is more productive to consider how Milton engages with a common Renaissance poetic trope concerning the body’s continuing generative capabilities after death.

The audience of John Donne’s (1572-1631) sermon at St. Paul’s Cathedral, for instance, was indeed taken aback as the Dean wondered aloud whether death is ‘the last death that the body shall suffer?’ To which, Dr. Donne answers himself by declaring, ‘It is not.’ As Blaine Greteman has written, Donne ‘revels for page after page in the details’ of the body’s corruption.<sup>32</sup> Most vividly, Donne reveals how a family of worms springs from the corpse who are simultaneously ‘my mother, and my sister, and my selfe,’ and who ‘shall feed, and feed sweetly upon me’.<sup>33</sup> Andrew Marvell’s (1621-78) ‘To His Coy Mistress’ is another example where the worms of the body are employed to persuade the beloved subject of the poem not to delay copulation in this life for fear of the worms’ copulation in the grave.<sup>34</sup> Samson’s startling imagery works to perpetuate Samson’s in-between condition between life and death. His chronic pain ensures that Samson will always remain on the threshold that separates existence from lifeless matter, with his blindness and insomnia ensuring he has no reprieve from his torments.

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<sup>32</sup> Blaine Greteman, “‘All this seed pearl’: John Donne and Bodily Presence’, *College Literature*, 37.3 (2010), pp. 26-42, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> John Donne, *Sermons of John Donne*, eds. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson, 10 vol. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), X, p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> The resonance Donne has with Milton is also apparent. According to Dennis Kezar, Donne’s reference to how he was ‘graving all his life’ is markedly similar to the ‘Samson-like “living death”’. See Kezar, ‘Samson’s Death by Theater and Milton’s Art of Dying’, p. 309. This chapter’s argument differs insofar as it finds Samson critiquing rather than following the humanist anthologized script of the *ars moriendi* tradition.

Still reeling from the shock of the excessive agency of the corpse's self-generated and self-annihilating worms, the chance of cooperative citizenry between the humans is annulled by Samson in terms resonating with Thomas Hobbes's brutal vision of the fragility of social cohesion. For example, the 'daily fraud... abuse and wrong' that plagues Samson's life both 'Within doors, or without', resonates with Hobbes's brutish view of interpersonal relationships as similar to the 'liberty' (i.e., the wanton violence) 'of the beasts.'<sup>35</sup> Moving beyond the content of these lines, narrowing our focus to the line, indeed, the phrase 'I dark in light' within line 75, there is an altogether more subtle, and yet, at the same time, more profound instance of Milton's representation of Samson's suffering from the inability to project his own subjectivity over and above a-subjective materiality. On the one hand, 'I dark in light', shears Samson away from his environment. He is the 'dark' – that is, blind man – that is surrounded by the 'light' of existence. However, on the other hand, if we attend more closely to the sound of these words, then we hear a completely different proposal: 'I dark-*en* light'. Samson's presence in the world necessitates that what was previously thought of as life-giving is now the source of suffering and pain.

Samson's description of the chronic pain inherent within his imaginative faculties radically deconstructs the supposed hierarchy of the living over the non-living. After a slippage into a Cartesian description of his situation ('I seek / This unfrequented place to find some ease; / Ease to the body some, none to the mind'), Samson, however, laments that:

restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm  
 Of Hornets arm'd...  
 ... rush upon me thronging, and present  
 Times past, what once I was, and what am now.  
 (ll. 19-22)

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, eds. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII, p. 101. See Chapter 5 for more on Hobbes's views on violence in society in tandem with Cavendish's poetic portrayal of the violence of the thought-process.

The power of movement has been handed over to the ‘restless thoughts’ as Samson is now immobile due to his imprisonment by the Philistines.<sup>36</sup> The concept of time itself is rendered inhuman insofar as it is ‘present[ed]’ to him not by reality *per se*, but rather, it is a figment of his Hornet-infested imagination. This is reinforced by the plural ‘Times past,’ which suggests a multiplicity of past times that encompasses not just objective reality but a multiplicity of a range of emotional inflections such as false, fabricated, and faulty memories. The infinitesimally-small ‘Hornets’ ‘thronging’ about the hapless Samson recalls images of buzzards around corpses. Hence, in the very act of expressing what separates him from all other forms of life – his power of imagination – Samson eschews any sense of futurity in favour of a stagnant (decaying) present. Note how the final line quoted above ends with ‘what [I] am now’; there is no future in Samson’s posthuman existence. Thus, we can see, as with the air’s ‘unjoining’ of ‘sound’ from ‘sense’ in the *Masque*, similarly, Samson’s thought-process, as well as his state of being (‘dark in / darken light’), results in a grotesque combination of composition and de-composition. ‘I dark in light’ on the page coexists with ‘I darken light’ in the mind. So, too, in the coexistence of ‘dark in/ darken light’ Milton renders our attempts to pinpoint whether Samson is active or passive in his pain is an endeavour that is undermined by its internal contradictions.

As the Chorus enters with a lamentation for Samson’s wretched state, Samson does hear his ‘friends’ approach and then proceeds to provide us with, according to Elizabeth D. Harvey, ‘a kind of auditory *anatomy*’: ‘I hear the sound of words, their sense the air / Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear’ (*SA* ll. 176-7).<sup>37</sup> To take up and broaden Harvey’s reading, the air, here, is not just the point of departure for Samson to provide a self- ‘anatomy’, but also,

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<sup>36</sup> The idea that thoughts actively hunt the thinking subject rather than the thinker grasping for thoughts, see the previous chapter’s discussion of Margaret Cavendish’s poetry.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth D. Harvey, ‘*Samson Agonistes* and Milton’s Sensible Ethics’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, eds. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 649-668, p. 655.

the air itself can be read as an agent that compounds (rather than remedies) Samson's disorientation. The air around Samson mirrors his earlier penchant for destruction insofar as it 'Dissolves' and 'unjoints' the ability of words to convey meaning to the listener. Samson, then, is the victim of believing the air to be his prison companion. As Samson must feel, rather than visually perceive his prison, he avers that his difficulty in drawing breath ('scarce freely draw') results from the fact that the 'air [is] imprisoned also,' and is reduced, like his own 'living death', to nothing more than a repulsive 'Unwholesome draught' (*SA* ll. 7-9). Compare this with the 'unjoining' that the air inflicts upon the sense of words 'ere it reach' Samson's ear, and we find that the air is not only free but, what is more, it resembles Samson's captors rather than a fellow-captive. Thus, it is necessary to return to the contention mentioned above by Haraway that posthumanism will usher in an unimaginable situation where 'people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines,' nor are they 'afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'. Where we should expect to find Samson agreeing with the Chorus's exaltation of his past exploits, we are, instead, presented with an improbable contradiction. According to Samson, 'to me', strength is my bane' (*SA* ll. 126, 63). The contradictory standpoint of *Samson Agonistes* can be summarised as follows: the gift of superhuman strength that Samson received from God pales in comparison to the 'gift' of weakness that Samson receives from his enemies.

To more fully understand the peculiarity – the unknowability – of Samson's misery, we must first confront the serious possibility that the Nazarite deliverer is not entirely human. Since he is 'man on earth unparalleled' and the 'Strongest of mortal men', it is unsurprising to learn that angels were seen at his birth, not once but twice (ll. 165, 168). However, if a cynical reader were to respond that the (twice) sighting of the angels – as Samson's parents reported it – can be explained by a parent's hyperbolic love for their son, Harapha's (the Israelite who goads Samson to battle just before the play's climax) guess on a possible alternative source for



Samson's strength warrants further investigation. In an act of oblivion that is worthy to stand in comparison with Charles II's policy of public amnesia, Harapha rewrites the history of his comrades' suffering in the battlefield by claiming that the only reason Samson 'disparage[s] glorious arms' of the Israelites is because, unlike him, their armour did not possess the 'black enchantments' which 'Arm'd thee or charm'd thee strong' (1130, 1132-34). Even his natural-born enemy Harapha wonders aloud that the enormity of Samson's strength must be posthuman in the sense that a supernatural entity ('Magician's Art') must have altered Samson's nature to such an extent that his physical 'charms' superseded the 'glorious arms' of his fallen comrades. What if, however, Samson's suffering could be explained by the fact that the 'gift' of life was never available to him? If, as we saw in the first section, the Lady of the *Masque* is denied the validity of her testimony by the fact of her dehumanization through the gendered prejudice of humanism, then, is it possible for Samson's agony to be similarly elusive since he does not belong to the same categories of understanding human pain?

Consider the evidence: Samson is, by all accounts, supernaturally 'unparallel'd' or magically 'charm'd' as it pertains to his (super)physical strength. At the same time, he is suffering from a crisis of identity insofar that he does not, nor did Samson ever, exhibit any proof that he had self-governance. In other words, to slightly alter John Carey's controversial comparison of Samson to the airline hijackers of the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001, Samson is not a suicide bomber, but rather, he is the hijacked plane.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, when Samson was engaged in aggressive territorial wars against the Israelites, like a hijacked plane or an early modern drone, Samson did not resemble a kind of holy warrior. His infliction of suffering was more akin to an indiscriminate drone attack. The lone drone that is activated

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<sup>38</sup> See John Carey, 'A Work in Praise of Terrorism? September 11 and *Samson Agonistes*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 September 2002.

and sent in the air to deliver death from above mirrors Samson's admission that 'what I motion'd was of God', which, in turn, leads to death for the Israelites from above, as is emphasized by the Chorus's choice of Samson's body part as they describe how their enemies fled 'under his [Samson's] heel' (223, 140).

Milton – the same writer who grapples with the perennial theological problem of the existence of evil in the twelve books of *Paradise Lost* – attempts to challenge the reader of *Samson Agonistes* to interpret the consequences of how in a world populated with posthumans such as Samson, racial genocide can be rewritten as collateral damage. 'We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us'. So writes Bill Brown in his articulation of 'Thing Theory'.<sup>39</sup> A practical example would be you do not notice the pen in your hand until the ink runs out, and you need to find a replacement. Humans are things insofar as we overlook our inner assemblages until they stop working. Samson, in Milton's hands, is a thing in suffering and in health. He is a thing when he causes suffering for others, and he is a broken thing when others note the outward manifestations of his melancholy.

To take Samson's infliction of pain upon his enemies, Milton does not revel in trying to describe the indescribability of God's plan as he does in his epics. Instead, the deflowering (circumcision) of the 'flower of Palestine' is repeatedly referred to as a job that Samson must perform (144). 'The *work* to which I was divinely called', how can I 'serve / My Nation, and the *work* from Heav'n impos'd', 'To some great *work*, thy glory' (226, 565, 680). With all the coldness of the euphemisms employed by a military strategist, Milton's use of 'work' to describe genocide performs a kind of cognitive apartheid. The suffering of the infidel (Israelites) is stripped of any remaining vestige of humanity. In his representation of Samson diligently performing his 'work', Milton does not afford him the perpetrator's status. Rather,

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<sup>39</sup> Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), pp. 1-22, p. 4.

Samson is markedly akin to the ‘jacquemarts’ that populated sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama. Wendy Beth Hyman defines the ‘jacquemart’ (often characters who are punningly called ‘Jack’ in Shakespeare) as an ‘automaton’ or ‘puppet’. Specifically, a jacquemart is a miniature wooden man holding a mallet who performs clockwork in that he strikes a bell on the quarter hour to alert the listener to the passage of time.<sup>40</sup> Moving beyond the telling of time, Hyman argues that characters often liken themselves to a jacquemart or ‘Jack’ for short across Shakespeare’s plays. For instance, Richard II’s description of his imprisonment as his becoming a ‘Jack o’ the clock’ because he is reduced to ‘renam[ing] his human body into blazoned clockworks.’<sup>41</sup>

Applying Hyman’s theory to Samson provides an alternative answer to whether Samson is an active agent or passive subject regarding the suffering he inflicts as well as the tribulation he must himself endure. Take his infliction of pain on others first. Recall Harapha’s speculation that Samson must have been magically ‘Arm’d’. This is an unusual choice of adjective to describe the source of Samson’s strength. When read in the context of Harapha’s objections to Samson’s disparaging of the Israelites’ ‘glorious arms’, the record shows that Samson is virtually naked in all respects when he engages in warfare. Indeed, artistic representations of Samson usually show him to be naked or wearing cloth for modesty. The point is Samson was not ‘Arm’d’ in the sense that he was wearing armour, but, following the thrust of Samson’s posthuman/automaton status, ‘Arm’d’ can also be read as a verb in that Samson was activated – that is, primed to perform his (clock) ‘work’ – to engage his enemies on the battlefield.

As for Samson’s posthuman pain, it is noteworthy how the Chorus describes the Nazarite deliverer’s condition during his imprisonment:

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<sup>40</sup> See Wendy Beth Hyman, “For now hath time made me his numbering clock’: Shakespeare’s Jacquemarts’, *Early Theatre*, 16.2 (2013), pp. 143-56, esp. p. 145.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

See how he lies at random, carelessly diffuse'd  
With languish't head unpropt...  
O'erworn and soil'd;  
Or do my eyes misrepresent?  
(118-19, 123-24)

While Drew Daniel views the above lines as indicative of Samson's melancholy – which would render Samson as susceptible to a universal human disorder – an alternative reading can be gainfully pursued through reference to the automaton.<sup>42</sup> The Chorus's blazon of Samson's languishing state can be equally applied to a broken object ('lies at random, carelessly diffuse'd', 'head unpropt', 'O'erworn and soil'd'). The puppet Samson's strings have been cut. Unarmed and deactivated, the languishing Samson does not cut a figure struck down by melancholy, but, instead, he is an 'O'erworn and soil'd' form of technology that is now obsolete. In Samson's 'rousing motions', then, which lead him to his final act of revenge, sticking to the automaton paradigm, the regrowing of his hair serves as a kind of reactivation of his antenna that facilitates his strength (1382). As the Semichorus digests the news of Samson's toppling of the pillars, genocide is considered a form of collateral damage once again. Marvelling at the sudden re-emergence of Samson's strength and the eventual completion of his mission, Samson's death is side-lined under his epic simile likening recent events to the life cycle of a 'self-begott'n bird' (1699). Just as the phoenix becomes useless and reconstructed, so, too, does Samson when 'most *unactive* deem'd,' unleash 'a Holocaust' (1704, 1702). We see a dehumanization that conflates suffering with an entity's activation (Samson's), which resembles the automaton. Samson has no equal in terms of his physical strength, so it follows that there is no equal in his pain.

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<sup>42</sup> See Drew Daniel's examination of Milton's employment of the Renaissance trope of melancholy in *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 200-228.

## Conclusion

Engaging with the problematic nature of the Lady's and Samson's exclusion to humanity, this chapter has argued that *A Masque* and *Samson Agonistes*'s suffering cannot be adequately contained within the bounds of either passivity or agency. By paying attention to the gendered exclusion suffered by the Lady and the automaton status that Milton bestows upon Samson, we begin to formulate new habits of correcting our prejudices. As was the case with the *Masque*'s Lady, so, too, does Samson's tragedy explore the harmful effects of exclusion from humanity altogether. To read Milton in a posthumanist light may carry traces of anachronist thinking, this risk needs to be taken.

Indeed, the absence of humanist values in the *Masque* and *Samson Agonistes* is the peculiar genius of Milton. Suffering's redemptive purpose is not guaranteed, as the posthumous executions of the regicides clearly illustrate. The sense of suffering explored in the *Masque* and *Samson Agonistes* is one in which the aesthetic power of describing the indescribable is pushed to the breaking point. As human suffering is both universal in its presence and elusive in its absence of fixed meaning, Milton's taking up of the suffering of the 'rapt' Lady and the 'half dead' Samson points us towards a hermeneutic injustice of interpretation. While the Lady reveals the threat of violence that lingers in systems of belief on suffering through her reference to Orpheus, *Samson Agonistes*, on the other hand, completely rejects the affordances of humanism to describe the mass slaughter and torture that permeates throughout this closet drama. Progressing from his youthful assurance that we are distinct and have need to fear being 'overwhelmed unawares' by the inhuman, by the time of his *Masque*, Milton sows confusion and awe before the mysterious 'superior power' that can, at times, offer assistance to our plight. At the same time, Milton, towards the end of his life, in *Samson Agonistes*, urges us not (*pace* his critics both then and now) to foist moral judgements upon its protagonist, but rather, he

suggests the broader importance of a more profound realm of apprehension that is enabled by a post-existence, the pains, and travails of living a life after death.

## CONCLUSION

### *'Disburden Ourselves of Ourselves'*<sup>1</sup>

This study began with discussing the redemptive doctrinal views of suffering as articulated by John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in 1570. In tracing the history of suffering through the next one hundred years, the writers of this study – Marlowe, Donne, Marvell, Cavendish, and Milton – unsettle the accepted purpose and nature of pain. The imagination can guide reframing one's pain as embedded within the natural world (Marlowe). To locate suffering in the realm of body or mind has its own pains, and, as we saw in the work of Marvell, early modern poetry astutely retains the positive and negative associations of trying to meld the body and mind together. Simultaneously, the proximity of suffering and the imagination can be found in their mutual forms of self-destruction (Donne and Cavendish). Such a range of human suffering falls flat in the face of pain expression by entities that do not fall into the human continuum (Milton). As the critical reception of these disparate works suggests, we return – like traumatized victims – to grapple with the problem of conveying the experience of absence. As the examples catalogued throughout this study suggest, the power of language rises to meet the challenge of the emptiness within silence.

Writing about the literary depictions of suffering in the early period is somehow horribly fitting with the current COVID-19 pandemic. The basic human need to grieve has been suspended upon government notice. The desire for answers to our pain's source becomes bogged down in superstition, contradictory, or even false information. The necessity to tell your story remains fixed and will continue to do so. Separated by time, we are, nevertheless,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Disburden ourselves of ourselves' is a phrase borrowed from Marilynne Robinson, 'Humanism', *The Givenness of Things: Essays* (London: Virago Press, 2015), pp. 3-16, p. 15.

huddled close to the early moderns, especially now, with the return of a feature of life (plague) that had long been thought to be a relic of the past.

This study does not merely go back to the early modern period to retell how the artists – the poets and dramatists – used their different idiosyncratic styles to describe the affliction of their choice. It has demonstrated how these writers turned one of the worst living (suffering) features into art. More than this, the art does not reside merely on the poetic/dramatic skills of the writer in question. The current discussion adds to the current scholarship through its conjunction of the most elusive subjects (suffering) with the most perplexing attributes of the human being: imagination.

The diversity of writers and genres included in this thesis provides a glimpse into the different kinds of suffering that can be imaginatively conceived. Whether it is Donne's recounting of his suffering with fever or Milton's interpretation of the biblical narrative of Samson or Cavendish's fantastical point-of-view of the hunting of the stag, such investigations into how these writers engaged with and created new theories of the imagination anew, enables a greater awareness into the intricate networks of how innovative responses to the perennial problem of suffering emerge to fruition. To put it another way: this study's writers orient us to think of the dormant potential for the most malevolent of pains. Dispelling the assumption that imagination is merely a fantastical toy, the scope of these writers' ability to change the way the reader understands and confronts suffering should not be underestimated. The encounter between literature and suffering is such a profound relationship that attests to our shared vulnerabilities as mortals.

The preceding chapters have shown how writers from Foxe to Milton can be read with the aid of early modern theories of the imagination. Enriched by the conventional wisdom of the time, these writers provided different analyses of suffering facing the problems of early modern understandings of the imagination. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to confidently state



that these writers' critical legacies have enabled new methods to understand and write about pain. What might be missed by the historian of suffering is taken up by the literary scholar. From the outset, this thesis established itself as offering a new lens through which conceptions of selfhood can be explored. The suffering of imagining is an unacknowledged obstacle that humans have ingeniously found more and more ways to ignore. While it is a timeworn conception it is often easier for humans to destroy rather than create – whether that is an idea, a physical object, animals, or each other – this dissertation has revealed how representations of suffering create meaning as writers embark to find new routes between the body and the imagination. The representation of suffering in literature creates new paradigms to investigate the imaginative faculties. It is dramatic irony in the first-person wherein writer and reader alike are compelled to attend to the nature of suffering to realise attributes of the human condition that were previously withheld from them.

Furthermore, the age of individual indulgence we currently inhabit has, very recently, been (temporarily) wrenched into a crisis on a global scale. Esther Cohen ends her study of suffering in medieval literature with the rather bleak comparison between sufferers in her chosen period and today's: suffering is now endured in 'utter isolation and solitude', the 'modern sufferer is trapped inside her pain,' whereas in the Middle Ages, 'pain was shared, discussed, and transmitted through speech, art, and patterns of behaviour.'<sup>2</sup> This raises multiple questions: have things changed for the sufferers of today? If the Renaissance was a 'Golden Age of the Imagination' does it follow that the literary geniuses of the past were better at understanding the meaning of suffering? The texts studied here reveal how to disburden ourselves of ourselves is at the core of the emergence of selfhood.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Esther Rosalind Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *The Givenness of Things: Essays*, p. 15.

By way of conclusion, I wish to return to the last text studied, Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Towards the end of this tragedy, an unnamed character, simply known as the messenger, has witnessed a catastrophe. The extraordinary spectacle of Samson paraded around in chains is a temptation too overwhelming for anyone to resist. The climatic (self-)defiant act of Samson's destruction of the Temple of Dagon in which he kills himself and most of his enemies happens offstage in this closet drama. Thus, enters the surviving messenger. However, many obstacles hamper this messenger from performing the task to which he is assigned by virtue of his name.

Before he even gets the chance of acknowledging the recipient of the news most dear to him (Manoa, Samson's father), the messenger takes a breath to exclaim his own misfortune: 'O whither shall I run, or which way fly... For dire imagination still pursues me' (ll. 1541, 1544).<sup>4</sup> This Mephistophelian messenger cannot find a way out – only this time it is not Hell he wishes to escape, but rather his 'dire imagination'. From this compound, thinking itself is transformed into something dire – dreadful, dismal. If Renaissance selfhood is understood as the Golden Age where autonomy and the human, whatever that is, was invented, nobody told Milton's messenger.<sup>5</sup> Autonomy is not bestowed upon this person as he flees from an invisible imagination that haunts him; moreover, he admits it is 'providence' or a bodily 'instinct' that 'guided' him to Manoa's presence, not his own volition (1545). The messenger is neither human, for his name is unknown, and he serves only one purpose which he continually defers: deliver the message. The abundances of human *Being* are as elusive to him as the means through which he can find deliverance from his pursuer. I have emphasised throughout that the imagination can be better understood through the hermeneutic lens of suffering. While there is

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<sup>4</sup> References to John Milton's works are taken from *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).

anguish and fear in the never-ending pursuit of the ‘dire imagination’, this thesis has suggested the virtue behind the mind’s attempts to craft the suffering imagination into literature. In so much as suffering enables the subject to craft new forms of imagining the imagination, humans attempt to represent so frail a beauty as the thoughts and sensations that arise in an individual when the imagination pursues them. These suffering moments, in turn, shape the human mind through a kind of craftsmanship that leads to a modification in thought on the nature of thinking itself. To suffer imagination or imagine new ways and responses to suffering is to find that the self is constituted by discomfort and that subjectivity will always be painstakingly fashioned.

Our suffering imagination is like airy thinness that we must beat into golden words.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This is a paraphrase of John Donne’s ‘Like gold to airy thinness beat’ (l.24) from ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 120-1, p. 120.

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