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The Understanding of Sickness in Donne's Devotions

by JONATHAN GOLDBERG

WHILE no one would deny that Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* is a unique work of the imagination, critical comment has generally failed to perceive the commonplaces that lie behind Donne's thought. All too often the work has been labeled the 'curious' product of an 'anxious and restless mind'¹ when, in fact, Donne's devotional aims lead him to traditional themes and to a view of the self that tends to deny value to personal idiosyncracies. Devotional literature generally demands from both reader and author a kind of impersonality, or better, universality of self. The author of a devotional work focuses on that area of the self in which he and his reader share similar needs: both identify themselves as fallen men, the crucial fact in their self-understanding. In the words of *Maister Beza's Household Prayers* (1607), devotional literature is 'for my selfe and for any other,' for author and reader equally share the desire to be made 'perfect in faith, love, constancy, and to be short, in all Christian life.'² Donne's *Devotions* conforms to this conception of the self and expresses solutions to its author's dilemma within the terms of typical treatments of the theme of illness. What is remarkable about the work is the way Donne finds expressive possibilities in a genre that so circumscribes him. The purpose of this study is not, however, to examine the style and structure of the *Devotions*, but to explore the commonplaces which lie at the center of Donne's understanding of the meaning of his illness.

Donne's themes may be found in devotional books that instruct a

¹ Helen C. White, *English Devotional Literature [Prose] 1600-1640* (Madison, 1931), p. 254. Cf. C. J. Stranks, *Anglican Devotion* (London, 1961), p. 65. For the adjective 'curious,' see Evelyn Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford, 1948), p. 251; Edward Le Comte, *Grace to a Witty Sinner* (New York, 1965), p. 186; *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. John Sparrow, 'Introduction,' p. xx. Page references to the *Devotions* within my text refer to this edition. One tradition in which the *Devotions* has been placed is that of meditation, by N. J. C. Andreasen, 'Donne's *Devotions* and the Psychology of Assent,' *MP*, 62 (1965), 207-216, and by Thomas F. Van Laan, 'John Donne's *Devotions* and the Jesuit Spiritual Exercises,' *SP*, 60 (1963), 191-202. One indication of the flimsiness of these connections is the opposing uses each critic makes of Ignatian techniques.

² Cited in White, *English Devotional Literature*, p. 92. For a handling of these matters from the point of view of the 'conservative Anglican' tradition, see Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I'* (Madison, 1968), pp. 3-14, and esp. pp. 34ff., on the generalized 'I' in Donne's *Devotions*.

Christian how to face sickness and the possibility of death. A manual such as M. M.'s *An Ease for a Diseased Man* (London, 1625) offers the standard topics. M. M. poses three questions: from whom is this disease; what causes sickness; what end does it serve (sigs. A2–A5^v). His answers—sickness is from God; it plagues man for his sins; it occasions repentance—render the consolation complex and elusive. For how is one to reconcile the sense that illness punishes sin with the belief that sickness causes repentance and thus leads to salvation. This dilemma is the focus of Tudor prayer books; Donne's *Devotions* has a place in the history of devotional literature in part because it confronts these paradoxes of illness.

The belief that God visits man through illness pervades all prayer books, no matter of what type or subgenre. The 'Order for the Visitation of the Sicke' from the *Book of Common Prayer* has the minister exhort the sick person to 'know . . . that almighty God is the Lorde over lyfe, and death, and over all thynges to them pertheyning. . . . Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, knowe you certaynly, that it is Gods visitacion.'³ Manuals of behavior in illness frequently begin with this point,⁴ and its initial position demonstrates its importance as the basis for the understanding of illness.

In his fourteenth expostulation Donne reorders the events of his sickness through this essential definition of illness as visitation. Donne reorganizes the experience of his critical days into a series of seven metaphorical 'days' which correspond to the points covered in the prayer books. The first of these days identifies the illness as God's visitation: 'this is the day of thy *visitation*, thy comming to me; and would I looke to be welcome to thee, and not entertaine thee in thy comming to me? . . . This leads me from my *first day*, thy *visitation* by sicknes, to a *second*' (p. 83). Donne recognizes God's visitation as an ambiguous good, for while it may indicate that he has been chosen, it points to his sinfulness.

³ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London, 1960), pp. 260–261. (Further citations from this edition appear in my text.) Cf. Lancelot Andrewes, *Manual of Directions for the Sick*, tr. Richard Drake in *Two Answers to Cardinal Perron, and other Miscellaneous Works* (Oxford, 1854), p. 181.

⁴ See, e.g., *The Sycke Mans Salve*, London, 1561. Becon first shows the sick man's comforters arousing him from despair by convincing him that God visits him in his illness. Philemon, the principal comforter, presents the sick man with what amounts to some thirty pages (pp. 13–44) of argument and example to win Epaphroditus over to this point of view. For another example, see the opening of *A new Booke, Conteyninge An Exhortation to the Sycke*, London, 1548.

Indeed, Donne's acceptance of his illness as God's visitation leads him into the traditional dilemma of the relationship of sickness to sin and salvation.

Donne's formulation of the traditional relationship between sickness and sinfulness can be found most succinctly in a late, undated Candelmas sermon. Almost in passing, in a subordinate clause, he notes that 'as long as the sinne, which is the cause of sicknesse, remaines, . . . A worse thing will follow. . . .'⁵ Donne's position rests on his understanding of the consequences of original sin. As he remarks in one sermon in an early series preached on the thirty-eighth psalm, 'God created man in health, but health continued but a *few hours*, and sicknesse hath had the Dominion 6000 years' (II, 79). Adam's fall, then, links sickness and sin, for sickness enters the world with sin.⁶ Further, fallen life is sickness, and any illness, however real, serves as a metaphor for the human condition. In Donne the palpability of the sickness coexists with its significance in paradoxical harmony.

From the first sentence, Donne's *Devotions* assumes this identification of sin with sickness. In his opening words, Donne equates the human condition with misery and then proceeds from his remark about the human condition ('Variable, and therefore miserable condition of Man') to his apprehension of his own physical situation ('this minute I was well, and am ill, this minute'). The tenuous and seemingly illogical connection between clauses⁷ rests on traditional associations of sin and

⁵ *Sermons*, ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson (Berkeley, 1953-1962), x, 80. Further citations from Donne's sermons appear in the text and refer to this edition. Compare John King's sermon preached upon King James' recovery from an illness: 'Sinne, the sicknesse of the soule, is the reall and radical cause of all bodily sicknesse' (*A Sermon of Publicke Thanks-Giving* [London, 1619], p. 33). Cf. St. Thomas More, *The Four Last Things*, ed. W. E. Campbell & A. W. Reed, *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, Vol. I (London, 1931), p. 474; Peter de La Primaudaye, *The French Academie*, tr. T. B. (London, 1586), pp. 29-30; Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie* (London, 1619), pp. 624-625, 635.

⁶ Cf. Thomas Becon, *The Physyke of the Soule* (London, 1549), sig. A7^v; Sycke Mans Salve, p. 47; Donne, *Sermons*, III, 83.

⁷ Donne's style is not illogical: it displays a parataxis best understood through Morris Croll's articles on Senecan style now gathered in *Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm*, ed. J. M. Patrick, et al., Princeton, 1966. Donne's style also has a strong place in Christian stylistics (cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. Willard Trask, Garden City, 1957, and *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, tr. Ralph Manheim, New York, 1965). Donne's parataxis reflects a figural view of reality, and his connections depend upon the Christian metaphors used to present his experience and place it within the context of Christian history. For closer analysis of the style of the *Devotions*, the final chapter of Joan Webber's *Contrary Music* (Madison, 1963) remains the best guide.

sickness. Throughout the first meditation Donne explores paradoxes of original sin. Man's condition is such that 'we are not sure we are ill' (p. 1); sickness, although natural, is unnatural (p. 2). Exposing his common bond with all men, Donne reports that he breaks 'into houses, wher the plague is' (p. 3), where by the plague he means sin, not sickness. For paradoxically, the physical occurrence of sickness points to the continual sickness of man, his fallen condition. Donne's sickness thus immediately acquires the metaphorical meaning assigned it by the prayer books. He registers his awareness of the traditional equation in the last meditation when he refers back to the opening devotion and to his method there: 'My *Meditation* is fearefully transferred from the *body* to the *minde*, and from the consideration of the *sicknesse* to . . . *sinne*' (p. 141). Donne initially finds his occasion emergent because he identifies sickness with sin. No wonder then that he centers his meditations on the paradoxes of the human condition since the fundamental quality which the Dean of St. Paul's shares with humankind is his sinfulness and the misery resulting from the fall, the cause of both his sin and his sickness.

Donne's self-exploration thus results in an examination of the human condition. Since Donne discovers his sinfulness he does not learn something about himself untrue of other men. His frequent admissions of guilt, 'I have sinned and sinned, and multiplied *sinne* to *sinne*' (p. 126), do not reveal specific sins or distinguish his sins from others'. Although Donne attempts to prove himself the worst of sinners, he claims no other distinction. He is like Becon's Epaphroditus, a man who will remain sick in sin until God turns his bed and makes His correcting hand a hand outstretched in comfort. Thus Donne's speculations on his experience recall traditional considerations, and throughout the *Devotions* he bases his understanding of illness in an awareness of original sin. Man continues in misery because of his illness and his illness is sin. In the *Devotions*, the words 'sickness,' 'disease,' and 'illness' become potent weapons in Donne's style. His wit forges connections through puns and paradoxes that point to the relationship of his condition to that of all mankind; behind these connections the traditional identification of sin and sickness lies.

The genre, however, views sickness in another way, and here again Donne finds fruitful material for self-examination. For sickness can provide hope that transcends the identification of sin and human misery. Although sin and sickness meet in a casual and metaphoric relationship,

the prayer books similarly equate sickness and salvation.⁸ Although sickness is God's punishment for sin it promises the sufferer that he will experience joy after death. As a sign of salvation, sickness then is 'the seale of the living God, wherewith his servants are sealed . . . unto eternall life.'⁹ Further, the patient acceptance of illness, with the recognition of God's guiding hand, assures the sick man that he has found the road to salvation. In a sermon, Donne recommends such patience: 'There is no better evidence nor a more binding earnest of everlasting Joy in the next world, then to find *Joy of heart* in the *tribulations* of this' (vi, 289).

In several sermons Donne points to patient suffering as a sign of future salvation. In a sermon of the winter of 1625(6) Donne presents the attitude, noting that the best men suffer most and that misery, although common to men, especially finds the chosen: 'It is a blessed Metaphore, that the Holy Ghost hath put into the mouth of the Apostle, *Pondus Glorïae*, That our *afflictions* are but *light*, because there is an *exceeding*, and *eternall waight* of *glory* attending them' (vii, 53). For this reason, he accepts his own illness with a certain amount of joy in the *Devotions*. Although he never ignores either the pain or the possibility of damnation, he nonetheless announces that God's afflictions come from his supply of riches (p. 155) and that '*affliction* is a *treasure*, and scarce any man hath *enough* of it' (p. 98).

Sickness, then, must receive cheerful acceptance. Donne summarizes the joy of tribulation in the *Devotions* when he insists in the seventeenth expostulation that 'They that finde not *joy* in their *sorrowes*, *glory* in their dejections in this *world*, are in a fearefull *danger* of missing both in the next' (p. 100). Donne does not develop a sense of the patient endurance of illness in the *Devotions*; he begins with this belief. He always knows God's capacity to make sickness an occasion for spiritual health; as he eloquently states, God is 'able to make this present sicknesse, everlasting health, this weaknes, everlasting strength, and this very dejection, and faintnesse of heart, a powerfull *Cordiall*' (p. 67). For Donne, traditional answers serve in the appreciation of his own case.

⁸ This is Epaphroditus' experience in the *Sycke Mans Salve*, pp. 48–60. Cf. Robert Filler, *A Treatise Conteyning Certain Meditations* (London, 1564), sig. c1v; *A New Booke*, sigs. A3, B3; *First and Second Prayer Books*, p. 261. The paradox is developed in Phineas Fletcher's *Joy in Tribulation* (London, 1632), pp. 22–23, and neatly summarized in Steven Jerome's *Seaven Helpes to Heaven*, 3rd ed. (London, 1620), sig. D4: 'Afflictions are trials, not punishments if we be sonnes; punishment, and not tryals if we be slaves.'

⁹ John Mabb, *The Afflicted Mans Vow* (London, 1609), p. 11.

Because of the paradoxical breadth of the formulae, Donne finds he can accept God's hand and that all must be for the best.

The belief that sickness signifies sin and yet leads to salvation provides the most insistent paradox in the prayer books and in the *Devotions*. A frequent metaphorical pattern suggests that falling in sickness is, at the same time, rising to salvation. By punishing, God shows his election; punishment signifies acceptance. Ultimately sickness causes rejoicing because resurrection is implicit in the act of casting down:

It is not that I rejoyce, though I be afflicted, but I rejoyce because I am afflicted; it is not because I shall not sink in my calamity, and be buried in that valley, but because my calamity raises me, and makes my valley a hill, and gives me an eminency, and brings God and me nearer to one other. (*Sermons*, IV, 343)

The dejection of the self, through illness, occasions humility, falling and rising at once.¹⁰

The prayer books delight in the paradox that sickness at once punishes and promises (as Donne writes in his 'Hymne to God my God, in My sicknesse,' 'that he may raise the Lord throws down'), that the crown of thorns is the crown of life.¹¹ John Davies of Hereford, for example, appealing to affliction, personifies her as the lady of the happy life 'though my life happlesse be' and asks her to give his soul 'endlesse peace, in endlesse strife. . . .'¹² The commonplace receives extended presentation in a poem entitled 'A Paradox. *The worse the better*' written by Christopher Harvey, a self-styled disciple of George Herbert:

Welcome my health: this sicknesse make me well.
Medicines adieu;
When with diseases I have list to dwell,
I'll wish for you.

. . .

¹⁰ This is equally the rhythm of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and thus a primary ingredient in Christian self-understanding. It is mirrored in Donne's prose and derives from the paradox of *sublimitas/humilitas*. In style and subject, the *Devotions* is an *imitatio Christi*. Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 25–66; J. A. Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies* (New York, 1964), pp. 183–193, esp. 191ff.

¹¹ In the *Sycke Mans Salve* Becon flattens out the paradox somewhat but does not lose it entirely: 'the nature and property of God is to wound: before he healeth, to throwe downe: before he lifeth up, to kill: before he quickneth, to condemne: before he saveth' (p. 373). Elsewhere, however, Becon is more in tune with the paradox. In *The Pomaunder of Prayer* (London, 1557/58) the exercise 'for a patient and thankfull hart in sickness' recognizes illness as God's 'loving scourge' (sig. DI^v).

¹² *Microcosmos* (Oxford, 1603), p. 80.

Health, strength, and richese, credit and content,
 Are spared best sometimes, when they are spent;
 Sicknesse and weaknesse, losse, disgrace, and sorrow,
 Lend most sometimes, when they seeme most to borrow:
 Blest be that hand that helps by hurting, gives
 By taking, by forsaking me relieves.
 If in my fall my rising be thy will;
 Lord, I will say, *the worse the better* still.
 I'll speak the Paradox, maintaine thou it;
 And let thy grace supply my want of wit.
 Leave me no learning that a man may see,
 So I may be a scholar unto thee.¹³

The poem, pedestrian as it is, does present a very full version of the paradox: sickness, a medicine, not a disease, despite superficial appearances, reveals the working of God when He puts his hand upon man.

In the *Devotions*, Donne exploits the paradoxical nature of this visitation. It gives him the opportunity to examine his humanity and to work out his salvation. He develops traditional ideas and images, including that of falling as rising. Early in the book, Donne writes that God casts him down, not away (p. 13) and even earlier, that his appetite is not gone, but gone up (p. 9). He depends upon the belief that in God's medicinal corrections ('even thy *Corrections* are *Cordial*' [p. 76]) 'the whole sicknesse is thy Physicke' (p. 89). Donne's recognition of the paradoxical benefits of his illness is epitomized in a phrase from the nineteenth expostulation in which he comments on God's ability to give in sickness 'the same *Word* for our *satisfaction*, and for our *Inquisition*' (p. 113).

The understanding of sickness displayed in the prayer books depends upon several Biblical passages. Among the texts cited most frequently as examples of the loving nature of God's scourges and the way tribulations lead to salvation are Acts xiv.22, Hebrews xii.6–8, and Revelation iii.19. The first text shows suffering as a martyrdom for Christ and stresses the cheerful endurance of illness. The texts from Hebrews and Revelation point more directly to the paradox. The passage from Hebrews is the most popular Biblical citation in the prayer books which attempt to present the proper attitude towards sickness:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

¹³ *The Synagogue, or The Shadow of the Temple* (London, 1640), pp. 13–14.

- 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?
 8 But if ye be without chastisement, where of all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

These lines demand the paradoxical acceptance of sickness as a way to salvation.¹⁴ Although the Bible offers consolation simply through the paradox of the loving scourge, the prayer books frequently resolve their hope in God as physician by seeing Christ as the surest relief to a man distressed by his sinfulness. They turn to Christ as physician with the support of the miracles of healing which identify Him as a physician.¹⁵ Donne identifies Christ several times as his physician in the *Devotions*, most fully in his fourth devotion, based on the word '*medicus*.'

Here, the calling of the doctor ('*Medicusque vocatur*') occasions a discussion of the spiritual physician who hopefully will cure Donne's sinfulness. Donne realizes that his sickness requires spiritual cures beyond those the physician can provide and, in the expostulation, discovers that prayer is the proper curative, that he must imitate God's servant David who prayed to be healed.¹⁶ The healing sought by Donne and David is their salvation, of course. Donne assures his Maker that he has 'come to a holy detestation of my former sin' (p. 19), and having done so, he may

¹⁴ To cite all the books which refer to the texts noted would be a prodigious and futile task. Hardly any of the books fail to mention at least one of the texts. Most cite all of them. A partial list of examples might include: Thomas Becon, *The Physyke of the Soule*, sig. A8; *The Pomaunder of Prayer*, sigs. CI, DI-DIV; *The Solace of the Soule*, London, 1548; *The Sycke Mans Salve*, pp. 70, 373; *Maister Beza's Household Prayers* (London, 1607), sig. H3^v; Daniel Featley, *Ancilla Pietatis, or the Hand-Maid to Private Devotion* (London, 1626), pp. 516-517; *First and Second Prayer Books*, p. 261; Peter de La Primaudaye, *French Academie*, p. 29; John Mabb, *The Afflicted Mans Vow*, p. 11; Robert Parsons, *A Booke of Christen Exercise, Appertaining to Resolution* (London, 1585), p. 221; Richard Rogers, *A Garden of Spirituall Flowers* (London, 1610), sig. B8.

¹⁵ Thus, in a popular collection of prayers, Augustine's *A Pretious Booke of Heavenlie Meditations* (London, 1581), Christ cures sickness since He took upon Himself the sins of mankind: 'Sick I am, I crie unto The physician; blinde I am, I hasten to the light; I am dead, and I sigh for life. Thou art the physician; thou art the light; the life thou art, ô Iesus of Nazareth' (p. 13). Christ is physician in Becon's *Sycke Mans Salve*, p. 43, and in several of Donne's sermons, e.g., v, 347 and vi, 72.

¹⁶ This is Donne's method throughout the expostulations. He constantly seeks out the Biblical text which illuminates his situation and tries to understand his condition by understanding the Biblical figures who anticipated him. While the meditations serve to place Donne in the context of fallen humanity, the expostulations place him in the context of Christian history. Through them, Donne makes himself into a Christian type. Each prayer then understands that type as a *figura Christi*. For the relationship of Donne's experience to Biblical archetypes, see Janel M. Mueller, 'The Exegesis of Experience: Dean Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*,' *JEGP*, 67 (1968), 1-19.

receive the physician who comes from God: 'I send for the *Phisician*, but I will heare him enter with these wordes of *Peter*, *Jesus Christ maketh thee whole*; I long for his presence, but I look *that the power of the Lord, should bee present to heale mee*' (p. 20).

Donne thus turns to Christ in his illness. In so doing, he shows that his disease means both that he needs Christ and that Christ is with him. Since he suffers two diseases, he needs two physicians, bodily and spiritual. But the first physician cannot minister to his ills without the other, and with that other there is no need for the first: 'There is no *spirituall health* to be had by *superstition*, nor *bodily* by *witchcraft*; thou Lord, and onely thou art *Lord* of both. Thou in thy selfe art *Lord* of both, and thou in thy *Son* art the *Phisician*, the *applier* of both. *With his stripes wee are healed*' (p. 21). The incarnation and sacrifice of Christ assures man his salvation and his cure. Christ heals the sickness of sin when the sick man puts on Christ.

In illness a man takes up the cross: he endures the world and, in so doing, imitates Christ. The human condition, signified by sickness, is not only misery, since disease may mean salvation. Sickness affords man the opportunity to discover his fallen condition, the sinfulness of his flesh, his misery, to use the word Donne stresses in his meditations on the human condition. Through this discovery, the sick man learns to shake off his attachment to things of the body or, more precisely, learns the right use of bodily signs as a means to acquire true humility. Thus, his physical humiliation, itself a reminder both of Adam's fall and Christ's crucifixion, leads to an act of humility, the imitation of Christ. In the process from humiliation to humility (recall that Donne initially describes the *Devotions* as 'This Image of my Humiliation' [p. xxxv]) the sick man is remade and the old Adam destroyed.¹⁷ As *The Pomaundler of Prayer* reports, sickness 'makest me a new creature,' an idea echoed in *The Sycke Mans Salve*.¹⁸ Sickness recreates man since in the

¹⁷ And, it would seem, the speaker becomes the new Adam; thus, in the third prayer he first calls himself God's sacrifice ('me thy *Sacrifice*,' p. 14), and later, though a calculated syntactic ambiguity, equates himself with Christ: 'Doe this, O *Lord*, for his sake, who did, and suffered so much, that thou mightest, as well in thy Justice, as well as in thy Mercy, doe it for me, thy *Sonne*, our *Saviour*, *Christ Jesus*' (p. 15).

¹⁸ Becon, *The Pomaundler of Prayer*, sig. DI^v. Cf. *Sycke Mans Salve*, p. 74; Bayly, *Practise of Pietie*, p. 664. For the theme of recreation (based on Isaiah lxii.2: 'Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name') see Thomas Taylor, *A Man in Christ, or A new Creature* (London, 1629), p. 53.

loss of his old sins he becomes a new man in Christ and more fully earns his name, Christian.

This sense of illness forms the basis for comfort offered in the 'Order for the Visitation of the Sicke':

And there should be no greater coumfort to christian persons, then to be made lyke unto Christ, by sufferying paciently aduersities, troubles, and sickenneses. For he himsele wente not up to ioy, but firste he suffered payne: he entred not into his glory, before he was crucified. So truely our waye to eternall ioy is to suffre here with Christe, and our doore to entre into eternal life: is gladly to dye with Christe, that we may ryse againe from death, and dwell with him in euerlasting life. Now therfore taking your sicknesse, which is thus profitable for you, paciently: I exhorte you in the name of God, to remembre the profession, which you made unto God in your Baptisme. (p. 261)

Although the human condition is continual sickness, the final meaning of the *Devotions* resides in Donne's insistence that life always offers the opportunity to remake oneself. The speaker of the book undergoes this transformation and thus can effectively convey it to the reader.¹⁹ As Donne says in a sermon, 'every correction from Gods hand, is a *Re-baptization* to mee . . . I should not have beene so sure of *salvation*, without this *Sacrament*, without this *Baptisme*, without this *fire* of tribulation' (VIII, 71.) In the *Devotions*, the fever which racks his body joins creature and Creator.

The fever reveals God's hand when it strikes Donne, but the fever also eats him up, consumes him ('*Lord, the zeale of thy House, eats me up, as fast as my fever*' [p. 131]). As it burns it obliterates the old man and his sins; although it destroys, paradoxically it creates:

this fever may be but a burning in the hand, and I may be saved, thogh not by my book, mine own *conscience*, not by thy other *books*, yet by thy first, the book of *life*, thy *decree* for my *election*, and by thy *last*, the booke of the *Lamb*, and the shedding of his blood upon me. . . . (pp. 52-53)

The seventh prayer perfectly represents Donne's sense that illness (the human condition) always carries with it the possibility of regeneration, the possibility of remaking the self in the image of Christ, although only in death can the possibility be fully realized:

O *Eternall*, and *most gracious God*, . . . I humbly beseech thee, to make this correction, which I acknowledg to be part of my *daily bread*, to tast so to me, not as I would, but

¹⁹ N. J. C. Andreasen arrives at similar conclusions in her study of the 'psychology of assent,' *MP*, 62 (1965), 208-209, 216.

as thou wouldest have it taste, . . . so O *Lord*, in these corrections, which are the *elements of our regeneration*, by which our *soules* are made thine, imprint thy two qualities, those two operations, that as they *scourge* us, they may scourge us into the way of thee: that when they have shewed us, that we are nothing in our selves, they may also shew us, that thou art all things unto us. . . . Let me think no degree of this thy correction, *casuall*, or without *signification*; but yet when I have read it in that language, as it is a *correction*, let me translate it into another, and read it as a *mercy*; and which of these is the *Originall*, and which is the *Translation*; whether thy *Mercy*, or thy *Correction*, were thy primary and original intention in this sicknes, I cannot conclude, though death conclude me; for as it must necessarily appeare to bee a *correction*, so I can have no great argument of thy *mercy*, then to die in *thee*, and by that death, to be united to him, who died for me. (pp. 40–41)

No accident in design, no mere chance causes Donne so often to end his prayers with Christ, or resolve his paradoxes in Christ; the Christocentricity of the *Devotions* serves at once its double nature: the examination of the self and the application of the commonplaces of the prayer book tradition as a prime tool in this process of self-scrutiny.

Donne successfully finds the proper voice for such a task, and the demand of universality that the genre makes is one in which Donne is comfortable. The *Devotions* does not record the suppression of individuality; rather, the work reveals the continuities between private experience and the human condition. The idiosyncratic and the universal merge: like Montaigne before him, Donne's highly individualized self supports a universal set of truths about the self. In Donne's case these truths are grounded in his religion and, to paraphrase Rosalie Colie, its orthodox paradoxology.²⁰

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²⁰ *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton, 1966), *passim*, but esp. pp. 28–33. The complex relationship between the personal and universal aspects of the self, and the solution of the tensions between them, is the focus of Richard E. Hughes's illuminating biography of Donne, *The Progress of the Soul*, New York, 1968.