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More Than Skin Deep: Dissecting Donne's Imagery of Humours

Abstract:

This article explores John Donne's imagery of humoral complexions in verse letters to patrons and in sermons. In the early modern period, the term 'complexion' referred to a person's unique mixture of humours, the four bodily fluids thought to determine appearance, behaviour, and health. Donne refers to complexions to raise questions of moral responsibility. Whether he seeks a patron's support or a congregation's repentance, he reworks humoral theories in elaborate, often playful ways, illustrating the necessity of whichever action he recommends. This article argues that his imagery of complexions warrants close attention, both for its rhetorical innovations and for what it reveals about Donne's verse letters. By focusing on his complexions trope, we can look past letters' flattery and recognize the literary trademarks—the imaginative thinking, wordplay, and themes—of Donne's other texts, and of his sermons, in particular.

Donne's verse letters to female patrons depict addressees who are remarkable, and remarkably similar. All are stunning, virtuous, generous, and humble: so humble, in fact, that they need Donne to reveal their virtues to them in verse. Critics tend to cringe at these relentlessly flattering epistles,¹ dismissing them as products of Donne's struggle to regain prestige at court after his illicit marriage to Ann More in 1601.² This article argues, however, that they reward a closer look. With their striking analogies and deft wordplay, they aim to invigorate—and substantiate—overused praise. This is particularly true of letters' references to patrons' complexions. When discussing these complexions, Donne uses bodily imagery to depict abstract concepts such as virtue and vice. He parodies prevailing health theories, providing a mock-scientific defence of the praise he offers. He is trying to pique patrons' interest, suspending their incredulity just long enough to elicit their financial and social support. In the process, he crafts some of his verse letters' most inventive, compelling writing.

In the early 1610s, when Donne wrote many of these letters, the term 'complexion' referred to two things: to the appearance of people's skin, and to their bodies' unique mixture of humours.³ The humours were the four fluids of the body—blood, phlegm, yellow bile or choler, and black bile or melancholy—that were thought to determine a person's behaviour and appearance, based on the degree to which each was present. Contemporary medical tracts argued that careful health regimens would keep one's humoral complexion balanced and prevent disease. Donne refers to these regimens in his writing, using them as a metaphor for other types of responsible conduct.⁴ He mentions them, and complexions, most often in verse letters and in the sermons he delivered several years later, starting in 1615. This distribution was not coincidental. In both genres, he uses the trope of humoral complexions and regimens to raise questions about moral responsibilities, culminating in a call for action: for patronage in verse letters, and for repentance in sermons.

In verse letters, Donne equates balanced complexions with patrons' virtuous behaviour, which should, he implies, include sponsorship of himself. In sermons,

meanwhile, he equates balancing complexions with rejecting sin. Both actions—giving patronage and seeking repentance—are ethical obligations, as essential as caring for one's body, he suggests. To contemporary audiences, regulating one's complexion would have been a familiar metaphor for conducting oneself responsibly.⁵ Knowledge of how to monitor humours was commonplace: there were many medical tracts on the subject, responding to readers' anxieties about preventing disease during the period's frequent epidemics.⁶

Characteristically, Donne's writing offers much more than a simple equation of regulating humours with behaving well. He builds elaborate analogies that use complexions as their starting point, blending corporeal imagery and dexterous wordplay. Gradually, he uses these analogies to demonstrate the moral necessity of whichever action—patronage or repentance—he recommends. His imagery of complexions forges an unexpected link between his verse letters and his sermons. Both genres feature similar themes, reasoning, and wordplay as he uses the complexions trope to outline a particular mode of conduct.

Critics such as David Aers, Gunther Kress, Heather Dubrow, and Arthur Marotti have analysed the language of Donne's verse letters, looking at how he adapted the conventions of requesting patronage in seventeenth-century England.⁷ Other critics, including Stephen Pender, Nancy Selleck, and Katharine Craik, have examined Donne's humoral imagery in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), an account of his near-fatal case of typhoid fever.⁸ No critic yet, however, has explored his imagery of humoral complexions. This imagery is well worth considering, for several reasons. It revamps clichéd advice, fuelling Donne's complex analogies. It conveys the period's interest in empirical knowledge as it proves his claims in playfully absurd ways. And it gives us, as modern readers, insights into medical knowledge that now seems foreign, enabling us to appreciate his inventive allusions to this knowledge.

To contextualize Donne's imagery of complexions, I will first summarize, briefly, the period's theories about how to regulate humours. I will turn next to Donne's writing, performing close readings of verse letters to Lucy Russell ('T'have written then') and Elizabeth Carey ('Here where by All') before analysing his sermon on Ezek. 34:19, delivered at Whitehall. My goal is to show how, with his imagery of complexions, Donne deftly bridges irony and earnestness. Whether he seeks a patron's support or a listener's repentance, he realizes he must charm before he can persuade. His imagery of humoral complexions would have been both familiar and startling to contemporary audiences, presenting commonplace theories in unexpected ways. With this article, I aim to restore an appreciation for the rhetorical merits of this imagery, and of Donne's verse letters, in general.

I.

'Good dyet makes the best Complexion,' Donne observes in his sermon on Job 19:26, alluding to Galenic health regimens.⁹ Both 'diet' and 'dietetics'—the early modern term for hygiene—derive from the Greek word for 'regimen', *diaita*. Early modern medical tracts prescribed health regimens modelled on those of Galen (129–199), the Greek physician whose writings form the basis of humoralism. These regimens offered advice on regulating one's sleep, exercise, diet, air, excretions, and emotions: the six

factors Galen called ‘non-naturals’ because they were distinct from the natural, human body. These non-naturals could disrupt an individual’s humoral balance and cause disease if not carefully monitored.¹⁰ Individuals could influence their humours, then, by regulating non-naturals—but to what extent?

John Fage’s *The sicke-mens glasse* (1606) voices the traditional view that the constellations at a person’s birth would determine his or her complexion. Each humour was linked to a specific season’s astrological signs and weather conditions. Cholera, for example, ‘hath power in Summer, from the 25. of *April* vntill the 17. of *September*’, Fage writes; accordingly, it ‘is hote and dry in temperature like the fire’, and like the season’s weather.¹¹ An individual would be choleric if he or she was born under summer’s ‘fierie’ astrological signs. Humans were thought to have no control over their initial complexions, which were ‘infused’, or poured, into their vessel-like bodies at birth.¹²

Donne uses the same verb, ‘infuse’, in his second sermon on Math. 18:7 as he describes the link between humoral complexions and sin. He delivered this sermon at Lincoln’s Inn, to a congregation of lawyers versed in defining guilt. His subject here—deciding how much blame one deserves for sinning—seems tailored to his listeners. He asks, how much are we responsible when we sin? How much is the Devil? How much is God, our creator? To answer these questions, he explains how sinful impulses are tied to humoral complexions:

The Devill did not create me, nor bring materials to my creation; The Devill did not infuse into mee, that cholera, that makes me ignorantly and indiscreetly zealous, nor that flegm that choakes mee with a stupid indevotion; Hee did not infuse into mee that blood, that inflames mee in licentiousnesse, nor that melancholy that dampes me in a jealousy and suspicion, a diffidence and distrust in God. The Devill had no hand in composing me in my constitution. But the Devill knows, which of these govern, and prevail in me, and ministers such tentations, as are most acceptable to me, ...¹³

We cannot change complexions ‘infused into’ us at birth, presumably by our creator, God. And we cannot change the fact that humours incline us towards certain traits: blood makes us lustful, for example, while melancholy makes us suspicious. Donne suggests, then, that humours are partly responsible for one’s sin. Jealousy is not distinct from the melancholy that causes it. Neither is a choice as much as a predetermined, physical condition.

Interestingly, Donne is not explicit here about who *does* put humours into us. If the Devil did not create our complexions, the implication is that God did—but why would God infuse us with humours that foster ‘indevotion’ and ‘distrust in God’? If God forms us of materials that tempt us to sin, is it fully our fault when we fall? Donne does not supply an answer, perhaps because he wished to skirt around the period’s heated debates about predestination versus free will. What is clear, however, is that our limited control over our fate mirrors, and results from, our limited control over our humours.

In his sermon on I Pet. 1:7, Donne again uses humoral complexions to explore questions of control and culpability. In this sermon, delivered at Lincoln’s Inn, he argues that an individual’s behaviour should not be blamed on a particular humour but taken for

conscientious choice. As in his second sermon on Math. 18:7, his focus on defining guilt was tailored to a congregation of lawyers. He writes:

Let no man therefore present his complexion to God for an excuse, and say, My choler with which my constitution abounded, and which I could not remedy, inclined me to wrath, and so to blood; My Melancholy enclined me to sadness, and so to Desperation, as though thy sins were medicinall sins, sins to vent humors.¹⁴

He condemns ‘medicinall sins’: sins defended as a type of purge, committed to vent excessive levels of a particular humour. People who act, or claim to act, in response to their humours have failed to take responsibility for their actions. Still, humours were thought to have their own agency, distinct from that of the individuals they inhabited. Fage personifies each of the four humours to convey this agency. Blood, for example, is a ‘nourisher and preserver’ that ‘hath dominion’ at particular times of the day. It ‘is knowne to abound’ when certain physiological signs—such as a reddish, blood-hued complexion—are present.¹⁵

Hygiene, whether good or bad, and purges are the main ways humans can alter their humoral levels, according to Fage. While a ‘good dyet’ is natural, non-invasive, and gradually effective, purges are violent and invasive, but efficient. Both have the same goal: to re-establish an individual’s humoral balance. Neither is designed to change an individual’s humoral complexion. If black bile typically dominates this complexion, for example, it is challenging—and undesirable, moreover—to reduce its presence in the body. The body tries constantly to restore its humoral complexion, to minimize its vulnerability to disease.¹⁶ Individuals can compromise their bodies’ natural defences, however, if they practice poor hygiene, neglecting the regimens prescribed for their complexions. Poor hygiene enables one humour to ‘inuade / The other three’, as Donne writes in his *Second Anniversary*, creating a humoral imbalance that compromises health (l. 124-5).

When Donne claims, then, that ‘good dyet makes the best complexion’, he argues that good hygiene is the most natural, non-invasive way for humans to maintain or restore their humoral balance. Although purges achieve rapid results, they do not support health in the long run. By contrast, a ‘good dyet’ is preventative medicine: it works with the body, strengthening its disease-fighting mechanisms over time and producing the ‘best’ complexion.

In verse letters to female patrons, Donne praises addressees’ physical perfection as an expression of their balanced humours, a result of their ‘good dyet’. More than their daily intake of food, this diet is an exemplary way of living. ‘Be content / With cordial virtue, your known nourishment’, he tells Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, a frequent addressee (‘T’have written then’, ll. 89-90).¹⁷ Russell’s diet consists of virtue: a fact ‘knowne’ to everyone, because virtue expresses itself in her perfectly balanced complexion. Like good hygiene, virtue requires strong will power to maintain. It deserves praise, then, because it is a deliberate choice of ‘nourishment’. The next section of this article focuses on Donne’s letter to Russell, exploring his claim that she is in complete control of her humours. This stance, at odds with humoral theories, suits his flattering purposes. His letter toys briefly with the idea that Russell might have too much virtue,

akin to too much of one humour. But he quickly rejects this notion, reassuring his addressee that she should not change a thing.

Donne delivered such excessive, absurd praise with a knowing wink, at least when addressing Russell. He had been writing to her since 1607, cultivating her friendship through multiple verse letters. Russell was in high demand as a patron, not just for her wealth—she could offer clients only small sums—but for her influence over Jacobean cultural life.¹⁸ As Queen Anne’s favourite lady-in-waiting, she could direct the queen’s patronage and shape the court’s literary tastes.¹⁹ Donne was eager to secure her endorsement in the wake of his illicit marriage to Anne More. When his marriage was made public in 1602, he lost his secretaryship to Sir Thomas Egerton, More’s uncle. Losing that place stalled Donne’s attempts to advance his career at court or in the law, Michael Donnelly notes.²⁰ He was forced to retreat from courtly life to his home in Mitcham—his ‘dungeon’, as he called it—where he spent the next decade writing to would-be patrons, trying to revive his reputation.²¹ He took special care to address Russell with the right tone. Mixing flattery with irreverence could ensure her affection and loyalty; too much irreverence, on the other hand, could offend her. His letter to her (‘T’have written then’), probably written in 1610, is a collection of strategic choices, from its jocular claims to its use of the complexions analogy.²² With his elaborate, semi-plausible conceits, Donne tries to entertain Russell just long enough to make a case for himself.

II.

Donne’s letter to Russell is characteristically ‘newsless’: it uses a range of conceits to flatter her, rather than providing any updates about his own life.²³ He begins by claiming Russell is virtue itself. ‘Your, or you vertue’, he writes: she has so much of the quality that she cannot be distinguished from it (l. 25). He twists this claim in his poem’s last fifteen lines, just when his praise is becoming insufferable. All this virtue might not be desirable, he teases Russell, invoking humoral theories in a pseudo-scientific defense:

Even in your vertues best paradise,
Vertue hath some, but wise degrees of vice.
Too many vertues, or too much of one
Begets in you unjust suspition.
And ignorance of vice, makes vertue lesse,
Quenching compassion of our wrechednesse. (ll. 75-80)

Donne claims that an entirely virtuous state is akin to having ‘too much of one’ humour, which would erode the balance of one’s humoral complexion, compromising behavior and health (l. 77). This abundance of virtue also makes others suspect Russell of ulterior motives. Moreover, virtue means less when a person is unaware of temptations: it develops by default, not in response to resisting sin.²⁴ So, paradoxically, Russell needs vice to develop Christ-like ‘compassion of our wrechednesse’ through participating in humanity’s struggles (l. 80). Not much vice is needed: just a sprinkling, or ‘aspersion’, to temper excessive amounts of virtue and produce a more balanced complexion (l. 81).

But Donne assures Russell in the same mock-serious tone that ‘Vice hath no office, or good worke to doe’ in her (l. 88). Her complexion remains balanced, despite its excess of virtue. He concludes:

Take then no vitious purge, but be content
With cordiall vertue, your knowne nourishment. (ll. 89-90)

Russell should not attempt to expel some of her virtue as if it were a disease-causing humour. Virtue sustains her, and she can never have too much of it.

His analogy—if not his tone—recalls his sermon on Psal. 38:2, in which he asks God, ‘Give us our Cordials now, and our Restoratives, for thy physick hath evacuated all the peccant humour, and all our natural strength’.²⁵ ‘Cordials’ referred to medicine that stimulated the heart, while ‘restoratives’ indicated any food or liquid that restored health.²⁶ In Donne’s metaphor, God’s ‘physick’, afflictions, has forced humans to reject ‘the peccant humour’, sin. Donne suggests that God should now administer the spiritual equivalent of the reviving heart medicines and restoratives given after a purge; in other words, God should reassure humans that they will be saved. In his verse letter, by contrast, he claims Russell has nothing corrupt or ‘peccant’ to purge. Again speaking figuratively, he counsels her to skip the purging phase of medical treatment and proceed straight to her restoratives. She need not reduce her virtue because she is perfect as is. Donne’s conclusion is generic, and expected, in a flattering letter to a patron, yet he magnifies its impact through deferring it.

Why describe virtue in these graphic terms, as an engorged mass that would have needed purging, had Russell not been perfect? Donne and his peers were fascinated by the public dissections in anatomy theatres that revealed the body’s inner workings, as Jonathan Sawday has argued.²⁷ Donne’s lurid portrait of Russell’s virtue is another type of dissection. As he describes the humour-like parts of her virtue, regretting their uniformity and lack of vice, he supplies empirical evidence to support his claims about Russell’s character. He is not as interested in her outward appearance as in the underlying, physiological basis of her virtue and beauty. As he observes in his poem’s middle section,

What ere the world hath bad, or pretious,
Mans body can produce, (ll. 62-3)

In early modern England, the human body was indeed thought to ‘produce’ virtue and sin (l. 63). Various internal organs and fluids were seen as responsible for certain emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, as Michael Schoenfeldt has shown.²⁸ Donne’s poem imagines the physiological processes that yield specific character traits. He realizes that, for his praise to work, he has to persuade Russell to go along with it: to ‘admit or chuse’ his ‘hymns’ (l. 15). By grounding his flattery in pseudo-scientific fact, he is trying to charm her into accepting his conceits, if only for the poem’s duration.

Donne also wants to convince Russell that he alone can decipher her. Humble Russell ‘can never know’ her own virtue, and virtue ‘suffers an Ostracisme’ in the hearts of courtiers, making them unfit for the job (ll. 29, 22). Again, his tone is tongue-in-cheek. Although he writes from his ‘dungeon’ in Mitcham, he is asking for her patronage so he

might resume being a courtier. He asserts, however, that he is an outsider: a 'Pagan' and a 'nothing' who is uniquely able to understand her (ll. 16, 7). True to his word, his final lines interpret her in a singular way, focusing on her physiology.

Previous lines set the stage for his distinctive, quasi-medical approach, aligning his verse with recent innovations in a number of fields, including medicine. The poem's digressive middle section refers to Copernicus's 'new Philosophy', about the orbits of the earth and sun; to 'mixt engines', a term used since 1538 for 'a complicated machine with moving parts';²⁹ to the settlement of Virginia in 1607; to the French surgeon Ambroise Paré's claim that 'stones, worms, frogs, and snakes in man are seen'³⁰; and to many other theories (ll. 37; 43; 67; 64). He uses these allusions to comment, loosely, on others' 'ills' and lack of virtue, a subject on which he invites her 'to meditate with mee' (l. 32). In the process, he flatters Russell with his assumption that she will understand his medical and scientific allusions. His letter presumes both generalist and specialist knowledge. Anyone familiar with the period's ubiquitous plague tracts would have understood his reference to purges and cordials, but only the well-informed would have known the Paré theory he mentions, which was not published in English until 1634.³¹ Donne is whetting Russell's appetite for when he will, inevitably, turn his attention back to her, examining her with an equally exacting gaze. As he closes the middle section, he pretends he got carried away by his various metaphors. 'But I must end this letter', he writes, and make it 'true to you' (ll. 71-2). He will be precise when analysing Russell, he suggests, as per the empiricism of the theories he has mentioned. But he will execute this precision with tongue in cheek. If he could be irreverent about Copernicus's widely-accepted 'new Philosophy', he implies, he will hold no punches when describing his close friend.

In his verse epistle's final section, Donne narrows his focus to one analogy, complexions, and one subject, Russell. His choice of imagery was strategic. After presenting arcane, theoretical material in previous lines, he wanted to end his letter on a more intimate note. Copernicus's theories might have been compelling, but they were abstract and distant compared to the daily, hygienic rituals Russell would have used to regulate her humours. Perhaps the most central of these rituals is the one he mentions in his last line, 'nourishment', which she would have considered several times a day (l. 90). It was also a term ripe with religious overtones, which Donne and his contemporaries invoked to suggest the daily diligence needed to sustain faith and resist sin.

The concept of spiritual nourishment appears, for example, in Donne's second sermon on Micah 2:10. Notably, his primary audience for that sermon was another woman, Lady Frances Hobart, Countess of Bridgewater.³² He delivered the sermon in 1622 at her 'churching', a ceremony in which women gave thanks after giving birth. Donne's allusions to hygiene speak to the ceremony's focus on purifying new mothers, and to the need to monitor health during and after childbirth. As in his epistle to Russell, he talks about nourishing the soul in terms of balancing one's humours. Augustine made a 'good diet' of contemplating God, 'feeding upon' God's teachings, his sermon claims.³³ Like food, a non-natural, this spiritual diet had a direct impact on Augustine's humours, giving him 'such a degree of health, and good temper'. By relating this abstract spiritual quest to monitoring humours, a daily routine, Donne makes it more tangible and relateable.

In his verse letter to Russell, meanwhile, Donne concludes by saying virtue is his addressee's 'knowne nourishment' (l. 90). It does the spiritual equivalent of balancing her humours, keeping her soul healthy. The fact it is 'knowne' is important. After ninety lines

of alluding to diverse areas of knowledge, he ends with jocular reassurance: rely on your instincts. Your virtue comes as naturally to you as a daily meal, so do not overthink it. 'Knowne' also reassures her that her virtue is universally recognized, despite his earlier warning that it 'suffers an Ostracisme' with courtiers (l. 22). As usual in his appeals, his compliment has a subtext related to patronage. Donne, too, is 'knowne' to Russell, having sent her verse letters for the past three years. His closing lines urge her implicitly to 'be content' with him, as well. With its allusions to a range of fields, including humoral medicine, his letter has shown how he can subvert the rules of patronage pleas and offer innovative, affectionate praise. Now, he implies, Russell should rely on her instincts and continue to endorse his verse.

III.

Donne's verse letter to Lady Elizabeth Carey ('Here where by All') offers its addressee more conventional praise. Donne appears to have written Carey only one verse letter, in 1612.³⁴ It proceeds carefully, if playfully, without presuming any advanced scientific or medical knowledge. The one medical metaphor Donne uses is his complexions analogy, a safe and tactical choice. It draws on commonplace theories about the humours, which Carey could have understood without medical expertise. It also departs from conventional flattery, offering Carey semi-plausible proof of her own worth. Donne is trying again to offer tangible evidence of virtue, something intangible. He claims Carey is physically made of the stuff: it is her 'substance' and in 'her materials' (ll. 15, 17). Unlike other courtiers 'whom we call virtuous', she does not don virtue like an 'ornament' (l. 15).

As Donne delivers these compliments, he refrains from teasing Carey in the way he does Russell: he does not joke, for example, that Carey might need some vice to temper her virtue. This virtue is fixed and above scrutiny, he suggests. He is trying to validate his praise, inviting her to believe it for the poem's duration. Part of the game is for him to claim that he believes it, too. He concludes:

May therefore this be enough to testifie
My true devotion, free from flattery;
He that beleeves himselfe, doth never lie. (ll. 61-3)

Like his letter to Russell, his poem anatomizes Carey's 'materials', or virtue, in verse. If this poetic dissection is persuasive enough, the praise it offers will be truth, not flattery—if only for a few moments. Donne reduces the act of lying to a question of intent. Questions of fact and truth are less important, he suggests, than whether the person making the claim believes what he says. He makes his argument plausible by redefining what constitutes a lie, in a subversion of logic that pokes fun at his claims to pseudo-scientific precision.

Carey is composed entirely of unchanging virtue, Donne asserts; as such, she is 'a firmament / Of virtues':

That is, of you, who is a firmament
Of virtues, where no one is growne, or spent,

They're your materials, not your ornament.
Others whom wee call vertuous, are not so
In their whole substance, but, their vertues grow
But in their humours, and at seasons show. (ll. 13 – 18)

Carey's virtues are fixed, not 'growne, or spent'. They are the unchanging 'materials' of the heavenly vault, not its ornaments, or stars, that constantly shift.

Donne's cosmological language was not coincidental. Stars were thought to create a miasma—an oppressive, infectious atmosphere—that would enter the body, corrupting the humours and causing illness. 'If the Starres be pestilently bent against vs', the pamphleteer Stephen Bradwell wrote in 1625, 'neither Arts, nor Armes; perfumes, nor prayers, can prevaile with them'.³⁵ Donne compares Carey's virtue to the firmament, not to shifting, miasma-causing stars. But 'others' in the court have virtue that appears 'at seasons', like constellations (ll. 16, 18). Donne uses his complexions analogy to illustrate this claim. Only a part of these courtiers is made of the physical stuff of virtue. One person has phlegm that is 'Vertuous, and not Hee'; another has 'Vertue in *Melancholy*, and only there' (ll. 21, 27). Moreover, their virtue 'grow[es]': unlike Carey's, it is not fixed and pervasive (l. 17). They are literally less virtuous than Carey because their bodies contain a fraction of the virtue that permeates her 'materials' (l. 15).

Carey's virtue, meanwhile, is too fixed to fluctuate in response to whims or humours. Donne's idealized portrait of Carey defies the conventional view that humours control all people to some extent, influencing their personalities, behaviour, and physical constitution. His claim would have struck even the most vain reader as absurd. But rather than move on, he expands his complexions analogy to further illustrate and defend his flattering claims. Far from being didactic, his proof is an extended attempt to divert her, charming her into accepting his praise.

His next argument builds on the contemporary belief that virtuous people's humours are perfectly balanced, creating a spiritual complexion that is gold in both colour and value. Their balanced humours enable them to contemplate virtue, rather than focus on immediate, bodily experiences. By contrast, 'those who distemper and misdiet them selues ... dull and stupefie their quicker intelligence, nay, disable all the faculties both of soule and body', Walkington argues.³⁶ Such people might act nobly on occasion, but their 'misdiet[ing]' prevents them from focusing exclusively on virtue.

Donne alludes to these beliefs when he puns that courtiers are 'but parcel guilt':

We're thus but parcel guilt; to Gold we're growne
When Vertue is our Soules complexion;
Who knowes his Vertues name or place, hath none.
Vertue's is but aguish, when 'tis severall,
By occasion wak'd, and circumstantiall.
True vertue is *Soule*, Alwaies in all deeds *All*. (ll. 31 – 36)

'Parcel' means 'a part, portion, or division of something',³⁷ and 'guilt' is a homophone of 'gilt', a gold covering. So, a 'parcel *gilt*' complexion is gold only in one of its parts, or humours. Moreover, that humour is only superficially gold, like a gilded object. 'Parcel' is also a contemporary spelling of 'partial', or biased: a state of mind linked to

imbalanced humours and literally intemperate behaviour. Meanwhile, ‘guilt’ refers also to spiritual guilt, or awareness of ‘our wretchednesse’, as Donne writes in his verse letter to Russell. ‘*Partial* guilt’, then, suggests biased guilt—guilt experienced only when convenient, or in response to particular things. Carey’s ‘true vertue’, by contrast, ‘is *Soule*, Alwaies in all deeds *All*’. Pervading her thoughts, actions, and emotions, it is not partial or parcel.

Donne next uses humoral theories to argue that Carey’s virtue is a Platonic ideal as well as a courtly one. According to Plato, virtue does not have ‘severall’ parts, unlike humoral complexions that are composed of four humours. In *Protagoras* (380 BCE), Plato argues that justice without temperance is not truly virtuous; nor is holiness without justice.³⁸ Similarly, Cicero argues in *De Finibus* (45 BCE), ‘Virtues are so closely united that each participates in every other and none can be separated from any other’.³⁹ Donne alludes to Plato and Cicero in a letter from July 1614, addressed to Henry Goodyer, his close friend:

Virtue is even and continual and the same, and can therefore break nowhere, nor admit ends nor beginning. It is not only not broken, but not tied together: he is not virtuous out of whose actions you can pick an excellent one.⁴⁰

A virtuous person’s actions express all virtues, always; as such, no single action should stand out as unusually virtuous. Donne argues likewise in his letter to Carey, ‘Who knowes his Vertues name or place, hath none’ (l. 33). Individuals can ‘name or place’ their virtues if they grow only in a particular humour, creating ‘a *sanguine* Vertuous man’, for example, or a person whose ‘*flegme*’ is ‘*Vertuous*, and not Hee’ (ll. 24, 21). This type of limited, fluctuating virtue abounds at court, making Carey’s constant virtue exceptional. Donne’s elaborate proof confirms that Carey is both a Platonic and a courtly ideal. His assertion of her timeless virtue—of her warmhearted ‘influence’ that is not merely ‘circumstantial’—seems conveniently strategic here, as he asks implicitly for her routine financial and social support (l. 35).

Donne’s image of locating virtue revives questions about morality and agency: questions to which he returned a decade later, in a sermon he preached on John 1:8 at St Paul’s in 1621, at Christmas. Whereas his letter praised Carey’s passive virtue, his sermon commands listeners to take action: to anatomize their souls, separating sin from virtue. As he addresses the large, diverse congregation of St Paul’s, he speaks as a spiritual physician, not as a flatterer. He claims it is best when the ‘distemper’, sin, is confined to a single part of the soul—the equivalent of a single humour—where it can be targeted and cured. Donne tells his congregation,

as long as there is in you a *sense* of your sinnes, as long as we can touch the offended and wounded part, and be felt by you, you are not desperate, ... But when you *feeles nothing*, whatsoever wee say, your soule is in an *Hectique fever*, where the distemper is not in any one humour, but in the whole substance; nay, your soule it selfe is become a carcasse.⁴¹

The ‘we’ here refers to preachers, like Donne, who help listeners identify and reject their sin. Unlike in his letter to Carey, his goal is to caution, not to reassure. But his logic

mirrors that of his letter to Carey. In both cases, virtue or sin is ‘felt by you’ only when it deviates from your normal state. When it is no longer exceptional—‘when you *feele nothing*’—it has permeated your entire being.⁴² For Carey, this conclusion invites complacency: she cannot ‘name or place’ her virtue because it is pervasive, a Platonic ideal (l. 33). For Donne’s congregation at St Paul’s, though, this claim offers a warning. If you do not constantly assess and care for your soul, Donne suggests, you risk succumbing to sin.

IV.

The next section of this article explores Donne’s sermon on Ezek. 34:19, preached at Whitehall for King James and his court. This sermon offers a strangely tolerant view of differences between the Catholic Church and the Church of England, considering that Donne’s audience included the head of the latter church. He assures listeners that, of course, James’s church is superior to the Catholic Church in many ways. Still, all Christians are part of God’s flock. To develop this argument, he takes his flock metaphor and runs with it, describing sheep with wool of different colours. He draws on humoral theories to offer one explanation for these colours. Donne crafted this extraordinary passage to inspire listeners to actively interpret scripture and assess their own soul’s health. With his humoral imagery, Donne forges a surprising link between offering patronage and rejecting sin. Both are morally responsible actions, he suggests, analogous to taking good care of your body.

In his sermon on Ezek. 34:19, Donne imagines Christians as red, white, and black sheep. His listeners would have recognized sheep as an analogy for the devout—for God’s ‘flock’, as stated in the biblical verse Donne takes as his sermon’s subject.⁴³ His listeners would have believed, also, that humoral complexions determined the colour of an animal’s skin, fur, or wool.⁴⁴ Donne suggests, accordingly, that the ‘Churches complexion’ dictates the colour of its individual members, or sheep. Each colour or shade that Donne mentions—red, white, and black—is associated with a certain humour. But these are also the colours of the four horses of the Apocalypse in Revelations, and of the horses in Zechariah. With these overlapping frames of reference, he discourages listeners from instinctively linking red sheep to cholera, for instance, or the Catholic Church to sin. Instead, he urges listeners to perform careful, deliberate acts of interpretation. ‘Let us reason together’, he tells listeners halfway through his sermon.⁴⁵ In the words of his sermon on John 1.8, he is trying to help them to ‘touch the offended and wounded part’: to be introspective and alert, analysing their own souls and those of others.⁴⁶

Significantly, this sermon about interpreting signs takes place at court, the context where, according to his verse letters, virtue is ‘circumstantiall’ and fleeting (‘Here where by All’, l. 35). In a world obsessed with appearances, he urges listeners to look more closely and more deeply. Like the sermons mentioned above, this one calls for agency: for active interpretation rather than passive acceptance of received knowledge. Not coincidentally, this is a goal associated with the Church of England, which condemned the Catholic Church for filtering scripture through intermediaries, such as priests.⁴⁷

The concept of red sheep would have been bizarre, even to an audience versed in humoral theories. Describing the changes that God’s flock experience, Donne writes,

But the strangest change is, that some waters change sheep into red, the most unlikely, most extraordinary, most unproper colour for sheep, of any other.⁴⁸

In a literal sense, red sheep would be extraordinary, indeed—and comical, as Donne suggests with his series of superlatives. But he ties the diverting image to a moral message. Red is an ‘unproper’ colour for sheep because it denotes sin, as he will explain here and in other sermons. Moreover, this sin is pervasive: it permeates the entire fleece, as though the sheep had been soaked in dye instead of water.

Donne builds on the assumption that an animal’s physical appearance responds to its humoral makeup. This logic was applied frequently to horses in the early modern period, as Gail Kern Paster has shown.⁴⁹ Donne implies that the red sheep of his sermon might behave like choleric, red-hued horses that are quick to anger. Conversely, they might behave like sweet-tempered, red and white sanguine horses. It all depends on their shade of red. Although red is the ‘most improper colour for sheep’ in some cases, one type of red is, in fact, ‘naturall’—‘the rednesse of *blushing*, and modesty, and selfe-accusing’.⁵⁰ Routine ‘selfe-accusing’, or self scrutiny, is essential for salvation, he asserts; without it, morality slackens. The skin of the virtuous, then, tends towards the pinkish hue of a blush.

This shade corresponds with that of ‘a sanguine pure complexion’, with its ‘sweet mixture’ of red and white, Walkington argues:

... hee which is possessed with a sanguine pure complexion is graced with the princeliest and best of all ... being most deckt with beautie which consists in a sweet mixture of these two colours white and redde, and for the gifts of the minde it is apparent likewise to our vnderstanding that they do surpasse al hardly incensed with anger ...⁵¹

This complexion is so ‘pure’ because it lacks excess, Walkington suggests. It is a mixture of two colours, red and white, and not the absolute red of those ‘incensed with [choleric] anger’. As a result, individuals with this pinkish complexion are, literally, more coolheaded, because they lack cholera’s dry heat. Their dispassion allows ‘the gifts of the minde’ to flourish. Walkington reinforces humoralism’s recurring theme that a complexion is ‘most deckt with beautie’ when humours are balanced. The complexion he describes is ‘sanguine pure’, not just sanguine. It is characterized but not dominated by blood, allowing it to remain balanced and ‘pure’.

Donne’s sermon refers directly to complexions that mix red and white hues. ‘The religious men of the Jewes ... were whiter then milke, and redder then pearle’, he writes: they were both devout, displaying ‘the whiteness of Gods mercy’, and sinful, revealing the ‘rednesse of sin’.⁵² Such complexions show that ‘where sinne abounds, grace also may abound’, Donne argues:

there is neither in the *holiest actions*, of the holiest man, any such degree of whitenesse, but that it is always accompanied with some rednes, some tincture, some aspersion of sin ...⁵³

Donne's image of an 'aspersion', or sprinkling, of sin recalls his reference to an 'aspersion of vice' in his verse letter to Russell. Whereas Donne flattered Russell that she needed no vice to temper her excessive virtue—that virtue being pervasive and constant—his sermon suggests that even 'the holiest man' will sin occasionally. Sin's redness tempers the whiteness of grace: it mixes devoutness with humble awareness of humanity's failings.

Donne returns to red and white complexions as he describes Elizabeth Drury's 'pure' blush in his *Second Anniversary*. He writes,

her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinckly wrought,
That one might almost say, her bodie thought, (ll. 244 – 246)

The concept of a thinking body builds on the idea that humours determine an individual's temperament, shaping her thoughts and actions. In this case, blood—a humour—is speaking, expressing the thoughts linked to her balanced humoral complexion. Its speech is eloquent and 'distinckly' expressed, without the bias or excessive passion of imbalanced humours.

Natural and admirable, blushing also signals the 'selfe-accusing' essential for salvation, as Donne argues in his sermon on Ezek. 34:19. He reiterates the importance of self scrutiny in his sermon on Gen. 1:26, in which he writes that humans are born with 'a rednesse that amounts to a shamefastnesse':

... a blushing at our own infirmities, is imprinted in us, by Gods hand. For this rednesse, is but a Conscience, a guiltinesse of needing a continuall supply, and succession of more, and more grace. And we are all red, red so, even from the beginning, and in our best state. ... This rednesse, a blushing, that is, an acknowledgement, that we could not subsist, with any measure of faith, except we pray for more faith; nor of grace, except we seek more grace,⁵⁴

Blushing is 'an acknowledgement', Donne argues, not an involuntary response. A thinking, feeling body chooses to express an internal state of shame and humility, announcing the soul's integrity. We possess this shame from birth and 'in our best state' because it is essential for redemption, Donne suggests. Without constant doubt and self-scrutiny, we become complacent, our virtue weakening. Blushing is, therefore, 'imprinted in us, by Gods hand'. It gives us a way to acknowledge our sins, helping us to achieve salvation.

Early modern theorists considered blushing a deliberate and commendable act, rather than an involuntary response.⁵⁵ Fittingly, Donne delivered his sermon on Ezek. 34:19—in which he refers to blushing 'sheep'—to a courtly audience that included more women than, for example, the exclusively male congregation of Lincoln's Inn. Giovanni Michele Bruto describes the physiological foundation for a woman's blush in his etiquette manual for noblewomen, *The necessarie ... education of a yong gentlewoman*. He writes,

where occasion shall be offered to make her vertue known, she must there be prompt & ready and not bold, but with a litle blushing (that presently by vertuous confidence will enter into her face) she shall shew that in her there is a reuerent heart, estranged from infamy, shame, and reproch.⁵⁶

Blushing offers women an occasion to make visible their emotional and moral character. If a woman is ‘prompt & ready’, possessing ‘vertuous confidence’, a blush will naturally ‘enter into her face’ at suitable moments. She can control her blushing, to an extent. She chooses the virtuous mentality that makes her body susceptible to blushing, enabling blood to rush to her face when appropriate.

In a religious context, likewise, blushing enables pious individuals to demonstrate their ‘reuerent heart, estranged from infamy, shame, and reproch’, in Bruto’s words. Giacomo Affinati argues in *The dumbe diuine speaker* that the devil prevents humans from blushing when they sin. Sinful individuals have lost their faith; as such, they can no longer use a blush to express it. Whereas Bruto’s etiquette manual links blushing to feminine modesty, Affinati portrays it as a ‘good or manly respect’: a noble, courageous act that signals respect for God:

... when a man sinneth, the deuil depriues him of all blushing, and euey good or manly respect, till he comes into the Church, and then he restores it him againe, and his comely blushing colour may be perceiued, euen with intire remembraunce of his heauy transgressions.⁵⁷

Affinati uses the adjective ‘comely’ to describe an appearance that is ‘pleasing or agreeable to the moral sense, to notions of propriety’.⁵⁸ Sinful individuals lose this morally pleasing appearance as their complexions become red with sin. When they resume their faith, however, their complexions reacquire a mixture of red and white hues. Whiteness denotes piety; redness marks ‘intire remembraunce of his heauy transgressions’. Together, the two colours create a blushing pink that enables individuals to make visible their piety, to God and humanity. The ‘remembraunce’ that the colour red signals also deters future sinning. Donne’s reference to ‘intire’ memory recalls his letter to Carey, in which he stressed that virtue was her ‘whole substance’, rather than being ‘circumstantiall’ or fleeting (ll. 17, 35). In his sermon, likewise, he suggests that an ‘intire remembraunce’ of past sins must not be fleeting—as in ritualised acts of confession—but continuous.

Donne proposes that another shade of red, ‘the rednesse of zeale and godly anger’, is ‘not improper’ for sheep. This shade is acceptable but not ‘naturall’, Donne implies, alluding to contemporary beliefs about the bodily passions. Zealous anger suggests excessive amounts of the passions—of love or hatred, for example. Too much of any passion was considered ‘potentially fatal’, Paster notes.⁵⁹ So, although ‘godly anger’ is justified, it departs from the body’s natural balance and is not wholly commendable. ‘The rednesse of zeale’ is the vivid shade of red associated with blind, choleric rage, rather than the pinkish hue of a coolheaded, ‘sanguine pure’ complexion. Donne signals ambivalence towards the former with his double negative, ‘not improper’.

Choleric red is not the worst shade for sheep, however. That distinction goes to the ‘rednesse of sinne’, Donne argues in his sermon on Ezek. 34:19. He expands this idea

in his sermon on Gen. 1:26, claiming that this redness comes ‘from blood shed by our selves, the bloud of our own soules by sinne’. Just as souls have complexions, so do they have a surface area that sin slices open, shedding blood. This blood becomes a kind of ink, with which we write an account of our sins. Donne specifies that this bloody ink is ours, and not God’s:

That redness is not his [God’s] tincture, not his complexion. No decree of his is writ in any such red inke.⁶⁰

God’s complexion can be seen in the faces of the devout: in the wool of God’s faithful ‘sheep’. Because sin originates with us, its bloody ‘tincture’, or pigment, is ours alone. It does not appear in God’s complexion.

Individuals seeking to eliminate sinful redness from their complexions can apply another pigment to their souls: the blood of Christ. This dye is also blood-red, but it is God’s ‘tincture’, not humanity’s. Miraculously, its redness cancels out the redness of sin, producing a soul that is completely white. Donne describes this process in his holy sonnet that begins, ‘Oh my blacke Soule!’:

Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white. (ll. 13 – 14)

‘Red’ is a homophone of ‘read’, mentioned in the sonnet’s fifth line: ‘till deaths doome be read’.⁶¹ The concept of reading Christ’s blood returns to the notion of humanity’s bloody ‘inke’, with which we write an account of our sins. If we read the message written in the ink of Christ’s blood, we find an account of his sacrifice that ensured humanity’s salvation. By focusing on this message and modelling our lives on Christ’s, we can eradicate sin and assume God’s complexion, Donne suggests. Christ’s blood has the ability, therefore, to make red souls white: a colour that signals the absence of dye or, in this case, of sinful redness.

Dye changes an object’s interior, as well as its exterior: it soaks wool, permeating every fibre. As a result, frequent sinners acquire a sinful redness ‘deeply died in grain’, Donne writes in his sermon on Ezek. 34:19. Wool’s ‘grain’ is its underlying matrix of fibres or particles.⁶² If dye permeates wool deeply enough to reach this matrix, the resulting colour is vivid. Scarlet dye is called ‘grain-colour’, in fact, because it must saturate the wool’s grain to achieve its concentrated hue.⁶³ Still, this ‘deep rednesse’ is ‘capable of whitenesse, in the application of the candor, and purenesse, and innocency of Christ Jesus’. Donne continues, quoting Isaiah 1:18,

*Come now, and let us reason together, Though your sinnes be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as wooll.*⁶⁴

Religious reasoning has the ability, like Christ’s blood, to reverse sin’s dyeing process and return crimson wool to its natural colour. It helps us achieve mental balance, curbing our tendency to sin, Donne suggests, just as a balanced temperament prevents a particular humour from dictating our actions.

Donne's dyeing metaphors lend immaterial souls the characteristics of a humoral complexion. Like skin, the soul in these analogies has a coloured surface. It responds, also like skin, to internal, humour-like influences—in this case, to the competing claims of faith, reason, and the bodily passions. Donne's sermons compare eliminating sin to purging peccant, or disease-causing, humours. The two processes are connected literally, as well as figuratively: balanced humours make an individual's behaviour more moderate and, by extension, less sinful. Still, humours do not actually control the soul. Only an individual's will power can do that, Donne argues. By choosing to focus on God and not on excessive emotions, we can improve spiritual health.

In his verse letters and sermons, Donne uses humoral theories to offer a strangely literal illustration of his arguments. With his graphic imagery, he aims to provoke an emotional response as well as specific actions. His verse letters to Russell and Carey appear to invite complacency, but, as his addressees knew well, he was seeking a very particular outcome.⁶⁵ To persuade patrons to give him the patronage he desires, Donne matches his tone and language to his recipient. He teases his friend Russell and presumes extensive scientific knowledge before requesting that she continue to be virtuous—and continue to support him. With Carey, a more distant acquaintance, he is less jocular and more careful, assuming generalist knowledge. He invites her to accept his flattery and, implicitly, assume the obligation that comes with it, in terms of patronage. In sermons, meanwhile, he embraces the absurdity of his humoral imagery. He develops this imagery incrementally, showing listeners how to interpret scripture in the process.

Reading these two genres alongside each other reveals surprising similarities between them. Verse letters might be sycophantic in the extreme, but their language, tone, and imagery is carefully tailored to their recipients, just as sermons are designed to address a particular audience and context. Both genres, also, recognize the futility in being too earnest or too direct. Letters must charm readers before they can persuade. Likewise, sermons must show rather than tell. They demonstrate the type of alert, inspired thinking Donne encourages, rather than simply describing it.

Additionally, both genres draw on the period's growing interest in empirical knowledge. Donne alludes to the 'new science' as he offers pseudo-scientific proof of his praise for patrons, and of his contention that all devout Christians are part of God's flock. He uses humoral imagery to inject familiar concepts—patronage and repentance—with new life, in ways that are still striking. This article has attempted to restore an appreciation for Donne's imagery of complexions and a sense of its original context. In the process, I have sought to show that his verse letters warrant more critical attention than they typically receive. Even though Donne regarded these letters as an unwanted obligation, he managed to convey in them the same kind of imaginative thinking, themes, and wordplay at work in his other texts, and in his sermons, in particular.

¹ Helen Gardner argues, for example, that Donne's verse letters 'cannot be counted among his finest poems'; still, 'they contain many lines and stanzas of grave beauty, and there is some amusement to be got from working out their subtle and involved trains of thought.' See Gardner, 'Notes on Donne's Verse Letters', *The Modern Language Review*, 41 (1946), 318. On Donne's 'grossly hyperbolic' flattery in verse letters to the Countess

of Bedford, Margaret Mauer suggests that letters' 'conspicuous impropriety seems to be intended by the poet,' as a means of teasing 'a less than ideal Lady.' See Margaret Mauer, 'The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne's "Honour is So Sublime Perfection"' in *ELH*, 47 (1980), 205-6. David Aers and Gunther Kress argue, similarly, that Donne's verse letters are remarkable in how they temper deference with assertiveness as he presents his case to would-be patrons. See Aers and Kress, "'Darke Texts Need Notes": Versions of Self in Donne's Verse Epistles', in Arthur F. Marotti (ed.), *Critical Essays on John Donne* (New York, 1994), 102-22. For a discussion of the transactional nature of Donne's verse letters to patrons, see Judith Scherer Herz's "'An Excellent Exercise of Wit that Speaks So Well of Ill": Donne and the Poetics of Concelament,' in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne* (Columbia, 1986), 8-14. Janel Mueller argues that Donne's verse letters to patrons are actually 'quite innovative' in how they associate 'ideality with the lives and persons of mature married women.' See Mueller's 'Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne for,' in *Modern Philology*, 2 (1989), 150.

² For a description of Donne's attempts to regain courtly prestige after his marriage, see M. L. Donnelly, 'Saving the King's Friend and Redeeming Appearances: Dr Donne Constructs a Scriptural Model for Patronage', in Cedric C. Brown (ed.), *Patronage, Politics, and Literary Traditions in England, 1558-1658* (Detroit, 1993), 81.

³ I rely on Robin Robbins's evidence in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robbins (New York, 2013), for the dating of these verse letters. Robbins notes that Donne's relationship with Bedford began several years earlier: 'Donne's first mention of Lady Bedford in a letter to Goodyer is one dated 14 March 1607 ... and implies an established

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⁴ Early modern theories about the humours were derived from ancient sources. Hippocrates (c. 460-370 BCE) is credited with originating these theories, which were expanded by Galen (c. 130-210 CE); for English translations of their key humoral texts, see *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd (London, 1978), and *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body (Peri Chreias Morion, De usu partium)*, ed. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, 1968). In early modern England, Thomas Walkington's *The Optick Glasse of Humors* (London, 1631) was an influential work on humoral theories. Published multiple times in the seventeenth century, it 'went beyond the usual expository tradition of such treatises' and 'foreshadowed the literary culmination of the tradition in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*' (Jillian Kearney, 'Walkington, Thomas (c. 1575–1621)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com> accessed 27 Mar 2015. Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia; or, A Description of the Body of Man* (London, 1615), 'the largest and fullest anatomical work produced in England up to its day and for a considerable time to follow,' offered a detailed account of medical applications of humoral theories (C. D. O'Malley, 'Helkiah Crooke, MD, FRCP, 1576–1648', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 42 (1968), 11). For a scholarly overview

of early modern humoral medicine, see Nancy C. Siraisi's *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990).

⁵ Early modern health treatises, such as John Fage's *The sicke-mens glasse* (London, 1606), equate responsible conduct with moderation, and the adjective 'moderate'—as in 'moderate drinking,' 'moderate exercise,' and 'Pulses [that] are moderate'—appears frequently (sig. I2^r). The goal is to 'conserueth ye good estate of the bodie' by finding a balance between indulgence and self-denial (sig. II^v). The period's religious texts also advocated moderate behaviour. Thomas Adams's *Diseases of the soule* (London, 1616), for example, promotes 'moderate Anger' over other types: 'this is the best, because likest to the disposition of God' (14).

⁶ Plague, smallpox, typhus, and typhoid were 'some of the major fatal and terrifying epidemics of the period,' Mary Dobson notes in *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997), 5.

⁷ See Aers and Kress, "'Darke Texts Need Notes'", 102-22; Heather Dubrow, 'The Sun in Water: Donne's Somerset Epithalamium and the Poetics of Patronage', in Dubrow and Richard Strier (eds), *The Historical Renaissance* (Chicago, 1988); and Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, 1986).

⁸ See Stephen Pender, 'Essaying the Body: Donne, Affliction, and Medicine', in David Colclough (ed.), *John Donne's Professional Lives* (Cambridge, 2003); Nancy Gail Selleck, 'Donne's Body', in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 41.1 (2001), 149-174; and Katharine Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Hampshire, 2007), 73-93.

⁹ George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 3 (Berkeley, 1957), 104. All subsequent citations from Donne's sermons will be to volume and page number of this edition.

¹⁰ Heikki Mikkeli, *Hygiene: In the Early Modern Medical Tradition* (Helsinki, 1999), 14.

¹¹ John Fage, *The sicke-mens glasse ... Whereunto is annexed a treatise of the foure humours* (London, 1606), sig. H1^r.

¹² *Ibid.*, sig. H2^r.

¹³ *Sermons*, 3, 173.

¹⁴ *Sermons*, 3, 286.

¹⁵ Fage, sig. H1^r.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Jeffrey Johnson, Gary A. Stringer, et al. (eds), *The Online Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne* <<http://donnevariorum.tamu.edu>> accessed 7 June 2014. All subsequent citations from Donne's verse will be to this edition, with titles and line numbers included in the text.

¹⁸ Richard Dutton, 'Patronage, Licensing and Censorship', in Donna B. Hamilton (ed.), *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford, 2006), 77.

¹⁹ Barbara Lewalski, 'Lucy, Countess of Bedford: Images of a Jacobean Courtier and Patroness', in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds), *Politics of Discourse* (Berkeley, 1987), 52.

²⁰ M. L. Donnelly, 'Saving the King's Friend and Redeeming Appearances: Dr Donne Constructs a Scriptural Model for Patronage', in Cedric C. Brown (ed.), *Patronage, Politics, and Literary Traditions in England, 1558-1658* (Detroit, 1993), 81.

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- ²¹ Donne calls his house in Mitcham a ‘dungeon’ in a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer; see Donne, *Letters to severall persons of honour* (London, 1651), 60.
- ²² Robbins, 703.
- ²³ For a discussion of Donne’s ‘newsless’ prose letters, see John Carey, ‘John Donne’s Newsless Letters,’ *Essays and Studies* 34 (1981), 45-65.
- ²⁴ *Sermons*, 3, 177.
- ²⁵ *Sermons*, 2, 54.
- ²⁶ Thomas Elyot refers in his *Castel of Helthe* (1539) to ‘Al thinges whiche be cordiall, that is to say, which do in any wise comfort the hart’ (90). Thomas Cogan’s *Hauen of Health* (1584) claims that ‘rise potage,’ or rice porridge, ‘is verie pleasant and easie of digestion and restoratiue’ (31).
- ²⁷ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (London, 1995).
- ²⁸ Michael Schoenfeldt, ‘The Physiology of Metaphysical Poetry’, in Margaret Healy and Thomas Healy (eds), *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing (1500-1650)* (Edinburgh, 2009), 145.
- ²⁹ ‘engine, n., 6’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> accessed 4 February 2015.
- ³⁰ Donne was referring to Paré’s argument that the human body, a microcosm of the natural world, contains the physiological equivalents of ‘winds, thunders, earthquakes, showers, inundations of water, sterilities, stones, mountains, and sundry sorts of fruits and creatures’. See ‘A discourse of certaine monstrous creatures’, in *The Workes of that Famous Chirurgeon Ambrose Parey*, tr. Thomas Johnson (London, 1634), 761-3, as cited by Robbins, 710 n.
- ³¹ Robbins, 710 n.
- ³² Elizabeth Allen, ‘Hobart, Lady Frances (1603–1664)’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com> accessed 6 Feb 2015.
- ³³ *Sermons*, 5, 204.
- ³⁴ It is the only verse letter to Carey included in Donne’s *Poems* (London, 1633). Robbins notes that the original version is also the ‘only poem of Donne’s to survive in his own hand’; see Robbins, 713.
- ³⁵ Stephen Bradwell, *A Watch-man for the Pest* (London, 1625), sig. A4^v.
- ³⁶ Thomas Walkington, *The optick glasse of humours* (London, 1606), sig. B4^v.
- ³⁷ ‘parcel’, adv., 1b, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> accessed 12 February 2015.
- ³⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, tr. C. C. W. Taylor (Oxford, 2002), 26-32.
- ³⁹ Cicero, *De Finibus*, 5.23 (67), tr. H. Rackham (London, 1951), 469.
- ⁴⁰ Robbins, 781 n.
- ⁴¹ *Sermons*, 3, 364.
- ⁴² Donne returns to this idea in *The Second Anniversary* when he writes, ‘This worlds generall sicknesse doth not lie / In any humour’; rather, ‘a Hectique feuer hath got hold / Of the whole substance, not to be contrould’ (ll. 240-1; 243-4).
- ⁴³ Ezek. 34:19: ‘And as for my flock, they eate that, which yee have trodden with your feet, and they drink that which yee have fouled with your feet’. See *Sermons*, 10, 159.
- ⁴⁴ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago, 2004), 169.

⁴⁵ *Sermons*, 10, 167.

⁴⁶ *Sermons*, 3, 364.

⁴⁷ In his second sermon on Matth. 18:7, Donne deplors the passive acceptance—or, worse, the misinterpretation—of another’s reading of scripture. He condemns the interpretive practices of ‘the Jesuit Maldonat’, or Juan Maldonado (1533-83), a Spanish theologian who was ‘a favourite target for Donne’s anti-Jesuit diatribes’ because of his ‘treatment of the Fathers whom, Donne claims, Maldonatus misrepresents, misinterprets, and denigrates’, as Katrin Ettenhuber notes (Ettenhuber, *Donne’s Augustine* [Cambridge, 2011], 91). ‘By the coucell of Trent,’ Donne writes, ‘he [Maldonat] is bound to interpret Scriptures according to the Fathers; and he is angry with us, if at any time we doe not so; and here he departs from them, where, not onely his reverence to them, but the frame, and the evidence of the place should have kept them to him; ... [Christ] threatens his judgements, not onely upon them that offend and scandalize others, but upon them also that are easily scandilized by others, and put from their religion, and Christian constancy with every rumour’ (*Sermons*, 3, 176).

⁴⁸ *Sermons*, 10, 167.

⁴⁹ Paster, 169.

⁵⁰ *Sermons*, 10, 167.

⁵¹ Walkington, sig. 11^v-2^r.

⁵² *Sermons*, 10, 167.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Sermons*, 4, 64.

⁵⁵ For example, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton writes that male blushing is a sign of virtue that is ‘proper to men alone’, in the sense that it is characteristic of men (whose virtue tends to be greater than that of women): ‘Bashfulnesse and blushing, is a passion proper to men alone, and is not only caused for some shame or ignomy, or that they are guilty vnto themselues of some fowle fact committed, but as *Fracastorius* well determines, *ob defectum proprium, & timorem, from feare, and a conceit of our defects; The face labours and is troubled at his presence that sees our defects and nature willing to helpe sends thither heat, heat drawes the subtilest blood, and so we blush. They that are bold, arrogant, & carelesse seldome or never blush, but such as are fearefull*’ (265).

⁵⁶ Giovanni Michele Bruto, *The necessarie, fit, and conuenient education of a yong gentlewoman* (London, 1598), sig. K6^{r-v}.

⁵⁷ Giacomo Affinati, *The dumbe diuine speaker* (London, 1605), sig. 16^r.

⁵⁸ ‘comely’, adj., 3a, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> accessed 21 March 2015.

⁵⁹ Paster, 11. The downsides of excessive zeal were a recurring theme of Donne’s sermons. Donne warned his listeners against ‘inordinate zeal’, Jeanne Shami notes, but he was ‘also careful to warn against extremes of discretion.’ She argues that Donne’s motives were partly political: his sermons of the early 1620s ‘contrast the excessive zeal of those who would reform abuses outside the law with the normal processes available for such improvement.’ See Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge, 2003), 19n, 90; see also Shami, ‘Donne on Discretion’, *ELH*, 47:1 (1980), 48-66.

⁶⁰ *Sermons*, 4, 65.

⁶¹ The meaning of ‘read’ here is ‘to learn or discover (a fact, truth, etc.) by study, interpretation of signs, etc.’; see ‘read’, v., 15b’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> accessed 10 April 2015.

⁶² ‘grain, n. 1’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> accessed 19 February 2015.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Sermons*, 10, 167.

⁶⁵ As Laurence Stapleton argues, however, there were other possible objectives at work in these verse letters, in addition to Donne’s implicit requests for a patron’s financial and social support: ‘For, if the theme of virtue furnished a ready pattern for the poem of compliment responding to a patron’s kindness, it also became the instrument for Donne’s anatomy of his own loyalties, his degree of commitment in the decade 1600-1610, the period of his inability to find employment, the period preceding his choice of the ministry as a profession’ (Stapleton, ‘The Theme of Virtue in Donne’s Verse Epistles’, *Studies in Philology*, 55 [1958], 187).