(EN)COUNTERING DEATH:
DEFENSES AGAINST MORTALITY IN
FIVE LATER MEDIEVAL/EARLY MODERN LITERARY TEXTS

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Introduction

This study will examine the role that death itself or some figural form of death plays in the development of protagonists who meet the following three conditions: (1) they are placed in a position where they must experience a type of death; (2) they eventually move away from this close conjunction with death, returning back into a world where their main business at hand is that of living; and (3) their experience either takes place in a text of high literary quality or is eventually recorded in such a text.

As these protagonists finally pull away from their experiences with death, they assume postures toward life that are informed by this event. It is possible that the subsequent posture will be one of deep confusion and existential concern. On the other hand, if the protagonists frame the experience so that it becomes a reflective exercise that teaches how to meet with death in ways that add meaning, purpose, and quality to life, then their final posture toward the experience can be a positive, profitable one.

In every case that I will examine, the experience of meeting death and then of moving away from it involves an encountering with death that gives rise to a person’s attempts to counter the spectacle. It is these acts of countering that I want to examine. My guiding hypothesis is that the protagonists who successfully counter death do so by assuming a position of authority concerning the ultimate form of the encounter. In essence, they become authors of their own material representation (a book, a poem, etc.) of the event.
The framing of this material representation is guided by a certain hermeneutic that not only allows them to read the event profitably but also gives them the means and confidence to interpret and counter death in future possible meetings.

This basic hypothesis is grounded in the assumption that the successful countering activity is in fact an act of primordial creativity, or a matrix of life-giving energy that brings form and order to the unformed and chaotic. By this energy, the persons who ultimately benefit from their experience are able to sustain a balance between encountering death and countering it, and when the ordeal is over, this balanced tension results in the formation or creation of a new life, or at least a new take on life.

The Five Texts

The literary texts I will examine are Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess* (c. 1368), Thomas More’s *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1534), William Shakespeare’s *Pericles* (c. 1608), John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), and John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* (1666). Each of these books lends itself to a study on defenses against death. In Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, the narrator is so sick and under such discomfiture and malaise that he fears imminent death. To induce sleep, he reads the classical tale of Seys and Alcyone, in which Seys dies while on a voyage but appears in Alcyone’s dream as an animated corpse who informs her of his death. The story causes a deathlike sleep to come upon the narrator, and he has a dream wherein he sees himself meeting and conversing with a black knight, who is mourning the death of his own beloved. The black knight is a figure for the narrator’s own sickness, but in its
otherness as a figuration, this character allows the narrator to observe death from a healthy distance. The narrator awakes from this dream, feels himself to have a renewed vigor, and begins to pen the poem recounting the event.

More’s *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* was written while the author was in prison, sentenced to death. It is a fictive dialogue between a Hungarian named Vincent and his uncle Antonio concerning the spiritual art of self-comfort in spite of the imminent approach of the deadly marauding Turks, by whom Hungary is sure to be captured and pillaged, the Hungarians exiled or killed. There is enough material in *Dialogue of Comfort* to justify approaching the work not only as a piece showcasing psychological defenses against death (much space is given over to justifying suicide, to describing the horrors of physical pain and torture, and to making jokes and jests meant to offset the terror), but also as an autobiographical piece, in which Antonio’s figure parallels the actual More. By the end of the book, both Antonio and Vincent have talked themselves into agreeing that a physical death is nothing to be feared, especially for the Catholic faithful who can expect a rich welcome into Heaven.

Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* has in it very little of the autobiographical (if any at all). Yet without doubt it has enough material to offer various ways to approach this issue of encountering and countering death. Pericles has an ability to keep death away from a body politic. He prevents Tyre, his own city, from becoming enmeshed in an unhealthy liaison with a deadly tyrant, and he saves a neighboring city from famine by sailing ships full of grain into its harbor. But when death confronts him in the apparent loss of his daughter Marina, Pericles slips into a psychological paralysis, losing his
speech and his will to live. Marina is, in fact, still alive. She, too, counters death, preserving herself as an individual: she escapes from an assassin, then from murderous pirates, and finally from a life of prostitution, which the play portrays as a living death. Marina counters death with dialogue, and it is with words that she finally revives Pericles from his stupor.

In his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* John Donne records and interprets his recent serious sickness, a sickness he thought would end in his death. Donne’s hermeneutic is based on his idea of “the three books”: the Book of Life, wherein the names of the elect have been entered; the Book of Creation, which is a semantic field of created things that await interpretation; and the Book of the Scriptures, which provides the illuminating key by which to interpret the Book of Creation. The many typographical and bibliographical references in *Devotions* suggest that Donne looks at death as a sort of book in itself, and that he counters it by simply re-setting its type and re-writing its conclusion. Death is a God-ordained process for Donne. As such, every aspect and experience of a created being has meaning, even death. By writing the *Devotions*, Donne makes sense of the experience and shows how such an experience is profitable for a Christian. He turns what is initially a frightening, destructive experience into a productive, beneficial one that offers eternal reward instead of eternal annihilation.

Finally, in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* John Bunyan assumes almost from the beginning that he is outside of God’s favor. That is, Bunyan thinks he is damned by God to suffer the torments of hell. The theology Bunyan embraces would have led him to see himself, in this condition, as being spiritually dead already, even as he lives in his
body. Consequently, he has to engage himself in an epic struggle to become spiritually alive. To accomplish this goal, he appropriates the life-giving power of the inspired biblical word. Throughout his narrative Bunyan fashions himself as being attacked, almost literally, by living words, words from the Scriptures that fly into his mind in order to confirm of his state of death or to bring signs of a new life forming within him. As these living words eventually bring Bunyan into a state of grace, a newfound sense of authority in words also awakens in Bunyan. He moves from struggling with words as dead things (as in his early accounts of incessant swearing, which he says was an attempt to create authority for his own effete words) to encountering living words, and then to becoming able to produce living words himself. Although Bunyan would not claim that his text was produced under miraculous biblical inspiration, he would claim that it was capable of a certain life-giving power, especially since he insinuated so much actual Scripture into his account.

**Rationale and Method for This Study**

The spread of the time between Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* (1368) and Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* (1666), roughly three hundred years, covers the boundaries of the Late Medieval/Early Modern period. This period is currently acquiring critical recognition as a period in its own right, and work that crosses the so-called divide from the medieval to the Renaissance period participates in this larger scholarly endeavor.

These five texts share other qualities that validate their being picked for this particular study. Each of these texts is deemed a text of high literary quality, by virtue of its author
and by virtue of the amount of critical attention it has received over time. The notion of high literature has sometimes come under attack, and maybe rightly so, but one cannot avoid acknowledging that certain writers have excelled in producing works of social and cultural relevance for their times—works of tradition, craft, aesthetic form, and internal cohesion and balance. Such are these five texts: they are highly artistic structures by authors who privilege creative form and representation. To subject them to literary analysis is a rewarding endeavor.

To write artistically is to represent creatively. To represent creatively is to determine a description. An artist must make choices about how to fashion the thing to be represented, and in such choices something of the author’s disposition toward the thing being represented is revealed. Because the subject being examined here is death, such revelations are certainly personally intense. Artistic descriptions reflect the nature of the human author as they represent the thing itself.

To represent creatively is also to determine the number of removes that will be introduced in the signifying process. Representation is manifestly not the thing itself, but is, in fact, a sign for it. For the study at hand, these acts of representing create removes, or distance, between the authors or personas and death. The distance can be increased or decreased; the author may represent himself in the text along with death, or the author may create secondary or tertiary representations of the primary representations. One example of this unfolding of multiple representations occurs with Donne in his Devotions, where he simultaneously represents himself as a sick body and also as the main observer of that same sick body. By another perspective, he represents himself first
as a son (the spiritual son of James I) and then as a father (the father of the *Devotions*).
The interesting thing with these particular representations is that both occur in Donne’s
“Preface,” where he insists on developing them in relation to each other. Another
example occurs with Chaucer’s narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* and the figure of the
dreamer, who are technically the same person (the narrator dreams about himself) but
actually different in representation. Moreover, when the dreamer mentions the black
knight’s retreat to his castle, the language used strongly suggests that the black knight is
John of Gaunt. This allusion is enough to warrant asking the question of how far the
dreamer or the narrator is a representation of Chaucer himself. These sorts of nested
representations are germane to artistic literature.

My method of literary analysis, if it approaches any school of criticism, finds itself in
general alignment with, or perhaps rather as a loose hybrid of, the methods of New
Historicism and New Formalism. Many writers and critics who sympathize with either of
these would balk at my suggestion that these are schools of criticism (and thus would
fault me for capitalizing the terms), seeing New Historicism and New Formalism more as
movements than schools. Issues of nomenclature aside, it is the idea of both paying
attention to the currency of signification in the culture contemporary with the text at hand
(a point of New Historicism) and looking to the literary form of a piece in order to inform
one’s criticism of it (a focus of New Formalism critics) that appeals to me in the
workings out of my own analyses.

By New Historicism, I mean a fairly recent body of work, mainly dealing with Early
Modern English literature, whose hallmark approach to the text is to investigate it
alongside other documents then current in the culture, usually documents that would not be considered *belles-lettres*. One of the main assumptions is that the intended audience for works we would now consider to be literary masterpieces was men and women who were immersed in the everyday data of their own culture, who would have understood the now-accepted literary masterpiece in certain ways that remain inaccessible to an audience unaware of this ancillary data, and who had viewed the piece not as an example of high art but rather as another document to be added to, and worked with, the lore of their culture. The original audience, then, connecting the piece at hand with current events and other current documents, privileged its use *within* the culture more than its artistic mimesis *of* the culture. Including this semi-detritus information in a modern-day analysis of the work, and structuring that analysis so that it reveals the possibilities of how the text might have been used in its own time and culture toward some end pertaining to the author and/or the audience, allow one to better approximate the original reception and appreciation of the work, and, upon doing so, to uncover certain uses the text had then that now may not be at play.\(^1\)

New Formalism is a literary phenomenon of the last thirty years when, slowly at first and then more rapidly, many more published and acclaimed poets than usual began working in meter as opposed to free verse.\(^2\) When critics began writing about what these

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poets were striving to do with their alleged “revolution” back to disciplined poetic form and, more importantly, when the critics tried to explain how the old forms used by these new poets were impacting change, they opened the door to a new formalism of criticism, or critical technique, not just of poetry.\(^3\) Also, the range of legitimate fields for analysis was eventually broadened to include periods and places other than late twentieth-century American poetry.\(^4\)

In this dissertation I will combine, to various degrees depending upon the text at hand, the cultural awareness of a New Historicism approach with the rigorous insistence of New Formalism that the form of a work contributes to the way the content frames reality.\(^5\) This combination will inform my reading of Chaucer’s poem and, to an extent, Shakespeare’s play. And to my knowledge, the methods of New Formalism have not been carried over to the criticism of literary prose pieces. I will attempt this carry-over in my analyses of the works of More, Donne, and Bunyan.

**Contribution to the Field**

Critical work that looks at death in these authors tends to gravitate to patterns that are more or less predictable. For example, with Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, a popular approach is to look at the death of Blanche, John of Gaunt’s first wife, in relation to the

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\(^3\) For an overview of this process, see Marjorie Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?” *PMLA* 122 (2007), 558-69.


\(^5\) This combination of New Historicism and New Formalism is not unique with me. Levinson addresses the technique, giving it the label “activist formalism” (559).
consolatio tradition, especially in a courtly environment. With More’s *Dialogue of Comfort*, a common focus is the text’s role as a dialogue against death. Critics on death in Shakespeare often focus on the tragedies. Not much is said about death in the later romances. For students of Donne, the temptation is to examine *Devotions* in light of some form of pathology Donne entertained, and more than one Bunyan scholar who has examined death in *Grace Abounding* have dealt with it as one deals with the first few pieces of a puzzle—setting them in place first only to move on to a larger picture of something else. Suffice it to say that no sustained study on any of these texts has endeavored to draw out the ways the main character seeks to subjugate death, before he actually dies, by means of a literary fashioning of the imagined, inevitable event.

On a larger scale, however, my work can make a contribution to the field of Late Medieval/Early Modern English studies in general. As mentioned above, a major

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unifying factor for these centuries (ca. 1375-1700) is the evolution of Christianity in England from a Roman Catholic schema to a predominately Protestant/Calvinistic one. For this reason, quite a bit of the critical work that seeks to examine English literary texts of this period, especially when the topic is related to an essentially human experience like death, attempts to read the material in the light of the Catholicism or Protestantism (or a strain thereof) of the time. To do so is essentially to focus on content and on context. Yet, as I have suggested above, the paradigm that will develop in this study is one that filters beyond the frameworks of these religious structures and settles into an apparently basic, instinctual evasion of death by means of containing it with semantic inscription. This study is essentially a focus on semantic manipulation and on style as tools for dealing with one’s own expiring existence.

Of course, it is important to note that the pervasive tenets of Christianity do influence the creative decisions and artistic motives of the authors of these five texts. I base this study, however, on the assumption that these works are grounded in a bedrock of values and beliefs that pass beyond the incongruities of Catholicism and Protestantism. This analysis is possible because these five texts cover a span of English history the events and ideologies of which provide this study with a sifting mechanism—the historical juxtaposition of these rivaling theologies. Chaucer and More are writing within the medieval Catholic context and have a deep allegiance to this context in spite of their respective complaints about particular abuses then evident in the religious structures of their day. Shakespeare constantly opposes Catholic and Protestant notions in his plays but in a manner so oblique that one gets not proclamations but rather contradictory hints of
affirmation or criticism. In contrast, the later Donne (the High-Anglican Donne of the
*Devotions*) and Bunyan are explicitly grounded in a Protestant worldview. This range of
theological stances suggests that if the authors’ strategies of countering death in their
texts were primarily anchored in their Catholicism or their Protestantism, then it would be
reasonable to expect irreconcilable differences to emerge in these strategies in proportion
to the rifts that emerge between the rival theologies. Yet these differences do not emerge.
Instead, what does emerge, as my study will show, is the authors’ focus on redrawing
death in terms (signs) that either distance it or inoculate it. They distance it by hiding it
behind representations. They inoculate it by inscribing it into a system of other signs, the
totality of which works toward the good of the living person. There is room in English
literary studies for research that attempts to draw a paradigm of response along these
lines instead of along the lines of separation of, or opposition between, Catholic and
Protestant postures.
Chapter 1

Writing Grief and Surviving Death in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*

In 1359, John of Gaunt, the third son of Edward III, married Blanche of Lancaster. Chaucer was about nineteen years old and already an accomplished page in the house of the Countess of Ulster, the wife of Prince Lionel.\(^{10}\) Chaucer was probably at the wedding. Nine years later, Blanche died. By this time, the Countess of Ulster had died (1363), and Chaucer was closely associated with Gaunt. He must have been, for just one year later Chaucer’s wife, Philippa, was listed among Gaunt’s household personnel, and Chaucer himself traveled with Gaunt into raids in France.

More telling evidence as to the strength of Chaucer and Gaunt’s connection is the fact that shortly after Blanche died, Chaucer wrote an elegy for her and, as the current critical consensus has it, dedicated it to John of Gaunt. This poem, the *Book of the Duchess*, is the first poem of substantial length and theme that Chaucer finished. He was still relatively young—somewhere between twenty-eight and thirty. The details are missing of how the poem was given to Gaunt, of how it was read or performed, and of what consolatory effects it had, but the worth of the poem itself, as a literary work, is clear. The *Book of the Duchess* is one of the first poems by an English author to stand on par with the sophisticated love poetry of the French courts of the thirteenth and fourteenth

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10 There is evidence that Chaucer was born around 1340, but the exact date has not been established.
centuries. More to the poem’s credit is the fact that it achieved this stature even though it had been written in a sort of aristocratic vernacular English, as French and Latin were still the main languages in England for important documents. Gaunt must have been grateful for the piece: from 1372 to 1388, Chaucer or his wife Philippa received annuities from Gaunt. The annuities stopped only when Chaucer decided to surrender them.

There is a keenness to Chaucer’s elegy. One editor of the poem comes quite close to revealing its defining quality when he states, “An important reason for the superiority of Chaucer’s poem is that it deals with a genuine tragedy—the death of a beautiful woman. At a stroke, this converts the insincere troubadour whining about ‘dying for love’ into poignant reality” (Fisher 543). The poem is intended to alleviate real grief. Its purpose is to provide genuine consolation. But its powers are not bound to the historical events and personages surrounding Blanche’s funeral. In fact, the characters Chaucer creates and the interactions he designs for them to have with each other produce an analysis of grief, mourning, and loss that is more nearly universal than it is localized. As such, the analysis becomes more useful as a defense against death than a strictly occasional poem could ever hope to be.

In Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, three persons—the narrator, Alcyone, and the black knight—each experience a meeting with death and subsequently react to the encounter. Of the three, only the narrator and the black knight survive their encounters. Alcyone does not. The survivors counter death’s threat by forming images or figures of the self. The making of such images creates a needed distance between the maker and the event, in which the image represents the person but patently is not the person himself.
Such constructed representations enable one to transfer the encounter with death from a literal, historical plane, where death threatens to engulf, to a figurative, imaginary plane, where death threatens only a representative image.

In order to delineate the evolving sophistication found in the various countermoves used in the trysts with death found in the *Book of the Duchess*, I will examine in this chapter first Alcyone’s utter failure as she attempts to cope with the death of her husband Seys; then the black knight’s partial success in dealing with his grief over the loss of his Lady White; and finally the narrator’s almost complete success in staving off a mysterious and deadly insomnia. What Chaucer presents in this poem is the idea that neither a material participation in a death encounter (as with Alcyone) nor a participation situated solely in the memory or imagination (as with the black knight) can help a protagonist escape the damaging effects of such an experience. Rather, as evidenced by the narrator’s survival, Chaucer shows that the movement from a remembrance of a death encounter to an aesthetic, written recording of it becomes a model for an effective countering method. Such transference is effective because the more a person can move a death encounter from the realm of real experience into the realm of controlled memory, and then from memory to an externalized account whose form and content has been fashioned, the more someone is able to shift from the position of a victim to that of a proprietor owning the final form of the experience.¹¹

¹¹ Although there are many critical pieces that examine one of these principle characters in light of another character (Alcyone in light of the knight, the knight in light of the narrator, the narrator in light of Alcyone, etc.) is numerous, few critical works carry out a sustained analysis of the three characters as discrete, individual personages, especially in a way that argues a maturation from one character to the other. Helen Phillip’s “Structure and Consolation” finds a typology operating in *Boo of the Duchess* among the narrator, Alcyone, and the knight. Julia G. Ebel’s “Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess*” claims *Book of the Duchess*
Alcyone’s Encounter with Death

Alcyone’s husband Seys sets sail across the sea and meets with fatal disaster—a tempest breaks the ship in half and “dreynt hem alle, / That never was founded [. . .] / Borde ne man ne nothing elles” (BD 72-74). The fracturing and dispersal of Seys and his entourage result in a felt absence of Seys’s presence back at home. Chaucer’s narrator describes the effect this absence has on Alcyone, saying that she

Hath wonder, that the king ne come Hoom, for it was a long terme.

Anoon hir herte began to erme, [grieve

And for that hir thoughte evermo

It was nat well he dwelte so. (BD 78-82)

Alcyone comes under a vague sense of disease, unbalance, vexation. She continues in this state until she makes a vow to the goddess Juno. If Juno will give her indisputably true information of Seys through a dream, Alcyone will become Juno’s votary. Juno hears the vow and immediately causes Alcyone to sleep. She then commands Morpheus (the god of

“is organized in three receding planes which are differentiated from each other by an increasing complexity and fullness,” the black knight being the most complex character (198). Robert W. Hanning’s “Chaucer’s First Ovid” examines the parallels of making poetry and making relationships in order to counter grief and claims that Chaucer “uses poetic creation as a symbol for [. . .] all the ways we come to grips with grief, distancing ourselves from it so that we can transform, commute, and thus survive its devastating impact upon us” while also giving place to the ultimately “arbitrary act of transformation that defies rational analysis” (122-230). And Robert R. Edwards’s The Dream of Chaucer, in its section on Book of the Duchess, looks to Chaucer’s sources to see how Chaucer changes the language of the three characters in order to display how the artistic codifications and traditions (the interior world of poetic subjectivity and the poetic imagination [see Edwards 68]) that encrypt and permeate the characters’ voices determines how successful they will be in escaping their deadly predicaments.

12 In all notes, the numbers following the abbreviation BD refer to lines in Kathryn L. Lynch’s Norton edition.
sleep) to re-animate the dead body of Seys, bring the body before the bed of the sleeping Alcyone, and inform her of Seys’s death. Morpheus does so, recounting the tragedy for Alcyone and enjoining her to “Let be your sorewful lyf” (*BD* 202). But when Alcyone awakes, “her eyen up she casteth, / And sawe nought. ‘Allas!’ quod she for sorwe, / And deyde within the thridde morwe” (*BD* 212-14).

That Seys’s drowned, physical body is brought by the bedside of Alcyone but yet is invisible to her upon awakening is a sign of a deficiency in Alcyone. What Alcyone had wanted in order to counter the approach of her death was words about Seys: “I nil never ete breed, / I make a vowe to my god here, / But I mowe of my lord here” (*BD* 92-94, italics mine). Chaucer has it that “whan this lady coude here no word / [. . .] / That no man mighte finde hir lord, / Ful ofte she swowned” (*BD* 101-03, italics mine). She also had wanted to see Seys. Eventually out of desperation she had asked Juno,

> “Help me out of this distresse,
> And yeve me grace my lord to see
> Sone, or wite wherso he be,
> Or how he fareth, or in hwat wyse,
> And I shal make yow sacrifyse,
> And hooly yours become I shal.” (*BD* 110-16)

This desire for words and for accompanying images is not a split desire, for obviously certain words are directly linked by the mind with physical objects and thus have direct figural correspondences lodged in the imagination. When heard, these words create (or recall) in the mind figural representations of the objects they signify. Although the image
thus delineated in the imagination or held in the memory might not be as vivid as the one
directly transmitted to the mind via physical sight, it is an image nonetheless, having a
sort of presence and existence in its own right. Thus one can argue that when Alcyone
desires words and images about Seys, what she really desires is to have an imagination
that is capable of filling the absence of Seys.

In her request to Juno, Alcyone reveals this deficiency in her imagination: she wants
words and images about Seys, but since she cannot make these words or images herself,
they must come from the outside, from someone else. In this manner Alcyone signals an
inability to construct creatively by herself a surrogate Seys out of her memories of him.
This reconstruction might serve as a mental effigy that would somehow buffer the
absolute void that Alcyone now senses as separating her from her late husband. The
tragedy is that when Alcyone awoke, even after having received help from Morpheus, she
awoke, she “saw nought” (BD 223). On her own, she cannot help herself counter this
grief by using her imagination, and neither can anyone else help her.

That fact that Alcyone cannot construct images of Seys to alleviate her grief suggests
that she does not know how to elevate her relationship with Seys beyond the material.
The preeminence of the physical materiality of this relationship forces Alcyone to look
for Seys outside of herself in the external world: she “sente both est and west / To seke
him” (BD 88-89). When she cannot find him, she vows never to eat bread again until he
returns. In this way, the physical demise of Seys brings about a corresponding physical
demise in his wife almost by her own insistence. Moreover, her complaint seems to focus
on the fragility of her own status of being constituted of the same material from which
Seys was made. The emotional logic appears to be, “If that physical material that made up Seys’s body could not keep Seys together, it will not be able to keep me together, either.”

In this light, Alcyone can be seen to be already mourning not only the demise of her husband but also her own death. At some stage in one’s experience of the continued and unexplained absence of a loved one, it is natural to assume tacitly that the person is dead and to begin to come to terms with the loss. On one level, Alcyone does appear to arrive at this point. Early in Seys’s absence, Alcyone’s heart begins to grieve, and she assumes a posture of mourning that solicits pity from others: “She longed so after the king / That certes it were a pitous thing / To telle hir hertely sorweful lyf” (BD 83-85). Her sorrow is beyond the worry that would characterize someone who still actually entertained hope that a missing loved one is alive and will return eventually.13

However, even though these indicators show that Alcyone subconsciously recognizes the fact that Seys is dead, on another level her incessant questioning is a very clear marker of a refusal, perhaps even an inability, to close fully with the situation. This hesitancy makes sense if Alcyone does indeed fear her own death coming toward her in the guise of Seys’s death. If Alcyone cannot effect a disconnect with Seys’s body, if her own identity is fused with the very material that constituted Seys, then her inability to access Seys outside the material points of contact is really an inability to maintain a sense of selfhood in a post-Seys life. Therefore, for Alcyone to admit the death of the body of Seys would be for her to admit the imminence of her own physical death.

13 See lines 95, 98, 100, and 104.
Because of the tension inherent in what Alcyone senses but cannot acknowledge, a stasis is created in Alcyone. She becomes stationed in her personal tragedy, unable to move away from the cutting edge of the disturbing loss. This internal freeze is mirrored in Alcyone’s increasingly immobile physical position. As her grief accumulates, she makes her desperate bargain with Juno, after which she begins to “heng doun the hed” and to fall into “a-swown as cold as stoon” \( (BD \text{ 122-23}) \). After her fall, her ladies “caught hir up anon / And broughten hir in bed al naked” \( (BD \text{ 124-25}) \), as if they think that she is really dead, with her corpse in need of funereal attention.

The tension revealed by Alcyone’s constant questioning is ultimately a result of her hesitation to reconstruct in her mind an image of Seys that she can carry with her perpetually and that would compensate her, once its construction were completed, for the absence of the material Seys. This construction of a memorial image is the act of remembering the dead, remembering in such a manner that it necessarily entails the trading of a physical presence for a spiritual (imaginary, mental) one. This act Alcyone cannot do, so when she asks Juno for information concerning Seys’s state via a dream,\(^\text{14}\) she asks for something she cannot handle.

Per Juno’s command, Morpheus’s job is not only to inform Alcyone of Seys’s death but to “shewe hir [. . .] / How it [the body] was dreynt” \( (BD \text{ 147-48}) \). Yet even this daemonically empowered body cannot penetrate Alcyone’s imagination. Morpheus’s message is supposedly delivered (the narrator never reveals what Alcyone heard or even whether she heard anything at all), but no healing image is permanently placed in

\(^{14}\) “Send me grace to slepe and mete / In my slepe som certyn sweven, / Wherthurgh that I may knowe even / Whether my lord be quick or ded” \( (BD \text{ 118-121}) \).
Alcyone’s mind. In fact, as shown above, when she awakes, she cannot say anything at all. Her lack of words reveals the extent to which her imagination is impoverished. The manipulation Chaucer does upon his Ovidian source in order to levy this silence upon Alcyone has been well documented. For some reason Chaucer wants Alcyone’s relationship with Seys to be overly committed to the material. He even changes the nature of Morpheus’s approach from a more image-bound one (according to his source) to one in which Morpheus has to inhabit Seys’s actual body. By standing at her bed and speaking to the sleeping Alcyone, Morpheus tries to give Alcyone signs—images, words—that she could house in her mind and use to construct a non-material image of Seys that would allow her to pass through the act of separation from the real Seys more gradually instead of all at once. However, Alcyone is not receptive to this cognitive image-making. She receives nothing from Morpheus, having at this point passed, per Chaucer’s representation, into silence and death. Soon after her dream, she dies.

The Black Knight’s Encounter with Death

The black knight encounters death when, as in Alcyone’s situation, someone intimate

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15 The question arises of whether Morpheus is standing next to the dreaming Alcyone or present in her dream, speaking to her in the dream. I take the text’s claim that Morpheus “stood right at hir beddes fete” (BD 199) and the fact that she heard but “saw nought” (213) to be warrant enough to suppose that Morpheus was not in Alcyone’s dream but instead was in a physical body by her side as she lay dreaming. Chaucer does not address himself to the physical mechanics of how Morpheus’s entry into the room would take place, but Chaucer does tell us that Alcyone lay alone in the chamber (146), which would explain how Alcyone’s attending ladies (124-25) do not see the body of Seys.

16 For example, see Wimsatt, “Sources” 237; Wimsatt, Chaucer 155-62; Hanning 135-36; Shannon 227; Cherniss 118-20; Edwards, “The Book of the Duchess” 193; and Robinson 32-35. For packed discussion of how the BD compares as a whole to Chaucer’s sources, see Kittredge’s PMLA article “Guillaume de Machaut and The Book of the Duchess.”

17 See Hewitt 24, note 12.
to him has died. This person is his Lady Blanche. Again, like Alcyone, the black knight’s
grief and loss progress to the point where death is now threatening him with
overwhelming sorrow, loneliness, and loss of identity. In the black knight’s words,

“I have of sorwe so grete woon [amount
That joye gete I never noon
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with al my might,
Is fro me deed and is agoon,
And thus in sorwe lefte me aloon.” (BD 475-80)

These lines initiate the rhymed complaint that the black knight utters to himself as he sits
against an oak tree in a surreal grove. The rest of the lyric clarifies the sort of death that is
threatening the black knight:

“Allas, Deeth, what aileth thee
That thou noldest have taken me
Whan thou took my lady swete
That was so fair, so fresh, so free,
So good that men may wel y-see
Of all goodness she had no mete!” (BD 481-86)

Thus, the black knight is neither afraid of death nor trying to avoid it. In fact, he seems to
want death to come to him, perhaps so that he can join his lady, or, at the very least, so
that he can have an end to his sorrow.

This attitude is corroborated in a confession made later by the mourner to the
dreamer:

“I wrecche, that deeth hath mad al naked
Of al the blisse that ever was maked,
Y-worthe worste of al wightes, [creatures]
That hate my dayes and my nightes;
My lyf, my lustes be me loothe,
For al welfare and I be wroothe. [at odds]
The pure deeth is so ful my fo [Death itself]
That I wolde deye, it wolde nat so;
For whan I folwe it, it wol flee;
I wolde have him, it nil nat me.
This is my peyne withoute reed, [cure]
Alwey deynge and be nat deed.” (BD 577-88)

The sort of death facing the knight—“Always deynge and be nat deed”—is not a physical death so much as a psychological death. It has captured his psyche in a limbo of sadness and disintegration. He later tells the dreamer that this lady was “My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyfe, / Myn happe, myn hele, and al my blisse, / My worldes welfare, and my goddesse” (BD 1038-40), and that

“Our hertes weren so even a paire
That never nas that oon contraire
To that other, for no wo.
For soothe, yliche they suffred tho
O blisse and eek o sorwe bothe;
Yliche they were bothe gladde and wrothe.
Al was us oon, withoute were.” (BD 1289-95)

If he was one with his lady in life (in his words, one in heart, in bliss, and in sorrow), then
her death has broken the wholeness of the union. Because of his lady’s death, then, he is
now, like Alcyone, facing an encroaching, permanent loss of his own identity and being.
The burden of this threat is overwhelming for the mourner; as he says, he is stuck in a
form of dying that never ends. Yet the black knight survives his struggle against death,
while Alcyone does not. What is the difference between his countering moves and hers?

Before addressing this question, a few background remarks are in order concerning
the black knight. The most common critical approach to this character is one that
addresses the historical context surrounding his presentation. Such an approach makes
sense, given the strong intra- and extra-textual evidence linking the poem to Chaucer’s
patron John of Gaunt and to the death of Gaunt’s first wife, Blanche of Lancaster. The
black knight is commonly thought to be a figure representing John of Gaunt’s grief.
However, knowing the historical outcome of Blanche’s death along with the survival and
eventual remarriage of John of Gaunt might cause a reader to assume in advance that the
black knight will survive in the poem. I have chosen to bypass the connections the poem
may have to actual events in order to focus instead on how it displays internal
continuities and incongruities in the development of characters.

Another line of criticism sees the dialogue between the dreamer and the knight as the

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18 See Edwards, *Dream* 65-66 for a brief but substantial overview of this evidence.
dreamer’s therapeutic engagement designed to cause the black knight to admit the brute extent of his loss. This line of argument seems misplaced in its emphasis on the black knight’s naïveté. The text makes obvious that the knight knows exactly what he has lost. His first statement asserts that his lady “Is fro me deed and is agoon” (BD 479). The conclusion near the end of the poem (“‘She is deed.’ ‘Nay!’ ‘Yis, by my trouthe’” [BD 1309]), which is much quoted in critical pieces that follow this path, expresses nothing different.

Another common critical approach sees the dreamer as helping the knight learn how to cope. To me, this view is far-fetched. The knight is engaged in a struggle against deadly grief, and he maintains mastery of himself before the dreamer enters into dialogue with him. As the dreamer approaches the black figure, he overhears the knight reciting a poem to himself. What follows immediately after the recitation is intriguing:

When he had made thus his complainye,
His sorweful herte gan faste faynte,
And his spirites waxen dede;
The blood was fled, for pure drede,
Doun to his hert to make him warm—
For wel it feled the hert had harm—

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19 Some of the more influential arguments are Kittredge, Chaucer 48-52; Kreuzer’s “Dreamer” passim; Bronson 872ff; and Ferster, passim. I am not suggesting that these critics’ arguments actually rest upon the assumption that the dreamer helps the knight learn what he has lost but that they rest upon assumptions that somehow the help (in understanding the loss, in coping with it, in displacing it, etc.) given in the conversation is primarily given to the knight by the dreamer.

20 Criticism looking at the knight as a project of the dreamer is far from scant. The general rout follows the following example in tone and assumptions: “In each of these brief dialogues the narrator is not only differentiating himself from the knight, but also trying to educate the knight, asking him to become aware of his own mental operations. [. . .] The narrator’s project is to help the knight return to social discourse, to open him to the influence of others and to remind him that he influences others in return” (Ferster 15.
To wite eek why it was adrad,
By kinde, and for to make it glad,
For it is membre principal
Of the body. And that made al
His hewe chaunge and wexe grene
And pale, for ther no blood is sene
In no maner lime of his.  (BD 487-99)  [limb

The struggle begins on a physical level, with the blood of the knight’s body rushing back
to stabilize and fortify the heart, but soon enough the knight begins to fight on an
intellectual level by entering into an inner dialogue with himself: he “argued with his
owne thought, / And in his witte disputed faste / Why and how his lyf might laste” (BD
504-06). This inner dialogue eventually allows him to master his grief for the moment
and to come out of his inner turmoil so that he may interact cogently and courteously
with an interlocutor (BD 514-521).

In fact, when he emerges from his mental battle with his grief, the knight does not
totter on the line separating civility and distraction, nor does he grasp at the dreamer’s
words for psychological strength; rather, he seems to be completely in control of himself.
After a few words past the initial greeting of the knight, the dreamer remarks to himself
and to the reader, “Lo, how goodly spak this knight, / As it had been another wight; / He
made it nouther tough ne queynte” (BD 529-31). The control manifested by the knight

21 For more on the medieval perspective of the physiological effects of a fatal or nearly fatal melancholy,
see Kruger’s “Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream Vision.” in Brown 51-83.
22 I want to argue that this gracious coloring that Chaucer gives to the black knight comes even earlier in
this first meeting between the dreamer and the knight. Consider again lines 515-20:
suggests that he has learned on his own how to counter his potentially fatal grief. The grief may peak as a crescendo on a periodic basis, a peaking that would in turn imply that the grief is not totally conquered, but at least the knight can fight his way out of the danger zone on his own. The question at hand, then, is what does the knight himself do that Alcyone fails to do, in order to survive the encounter with death?

The knight embraces a declarative stance over his loss, not an interrogative one (as did Alcyone), and he maintains this stance consistently throughout his discourse. Whereas Alcyone could find no means by which to cope with death, the knight displays to the dreamer that not only does he have cognitive material in his imagination, but he is

He was war of me, how I stood
Bifore him, and dide of myn hoode,
And grette him, as I best coude.
Debonairly and nothing loude.
He seyde, “I prey thee, be nat wrooth,
I herde thee nat, to seyn the sooth.
Lynch in her edition here punctuates line 518 with a full stop. Although in doing so she does not make a definite commitment as to which lines modifies which other line, yet she sets up the line so that one tends to read it as qualifying the greeting mentioned in the previous line, the dreamer’s greeting. If she does think line 518 modifies line 517, she would join the company of John H. Fisher, who in his second edition of his The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer punctuates line 517 with a comma and line 518 with a full stop. But this syntactic relation (as set up by Fisher) is far from certain. The manuscripts Bodley 638, Fairfax 16, and Tanner 346 do not have punctuation, so the issue of where lies the direction of the intended modification is an open one. In opposition to Fisher, I would align myself with W. W. Skeat. In his The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Skeat punctuated this little section as follows:

He was war of me, how I stood
Before him, and dide of myn hood,
And grette him, as I best coude.
Debonairly, and no-thing loude,
He sayde, ‘I prey thee, be not wrooth,
I herde thee nat, to sayn the sooth.

This punctuation would allow the Debonarily of line 518 modify the knight’s speaking. If this is the case, the knight at this point is of good disposition, courteous, gentle, and even pleasant and affable (see OED 2nd ed.). This is sufficient proof that somehow he has managed to control his inner turmoil.

23 The questions that the black knight does ask are mostly rhetorical, like the apostrophized question that appears in his initial complaint to death (“Allas, Deeth, what aileth thee / That thou noldest have taken me / When thou took my lady” [481-81]) and the questions interspersed throughout the knight’s speech that serve for discursive transitions (e.g., “The false theef! What hath she do, / Trowest thou? By our Lord, I wol thee say” [650-51]).
also using it to deal with his grief. This sense of construction and structure operating in the knight’s mind appears in the knight’s initial complaint: “He seyed a lay, a maner song” in iambic tetrameter couplets. Chaucer emphasizes that the song presented is an exact recitation of the knight’s words. The narrator says: “for ful wel I can / Reherse it; right thus it began” (BD 473-74). The knight himself chooses the meter and the rhyme. He engages here in poetry; he makes and builds an artistic construction.

Such poetic building appears further in the visual, imagistic memorial the knight verbally pieces together of his lady. When the knight describes the first time he met his lady, he tells of a noble company of ladies:

“It happed that I came on a day
Into a place there that I say

[see BD 470-86.]

Given the word poetry’s Greek roots in ποίημα, meaning “thing made” and ροειυ, meaning “to make.” See etymology of poetry in the OED 2nd ed. This idea of carefully crafting syntax and expression, along with the knight’s ability to dispute with himself (see lines 504-05) takes away the warrant of the claim that the knight is initially irrational. Such a claim usually takes the form of a proposition that ascribes to the dreamer a greater amount of levelheaded-ness than to the knight. For example, “The Dreamer [. . .] begins in the ‘safety’ of external, rationalistic detachment [. . .] whereas the Knight begins so deeply absorbed in grief that he fails at first even to recognize the physical presence of the Dreamer” and “In undertaking a rational explanation of death, then, the Knight himself becomes for a moment like the prosaic Dreamer” (Johnson Jr. 57, 59). I will argue here that the knight, in fact, is rational through-and-through. He is sentient to grief but not crazed by it, buffeted by death but successfully resisting it.

24 Critics who have investigate the imaginative processes of the knight include H. Cooper, in her “Chaucerian Poetics,” who highlights Lady White existence as primarily an image in the black knight’s memory, an image whose main function now is in helping the knight express his grief; L. J. Kiser, whose “Sleep, Dreams, and Poetry” explores how the black knight’s poetry allows John of Gaunt to receive a vision—to see—his lost wife; B. Bronson, who in “The Book of the Duchess Re-opened” points out how the knight uses his memory to refresh himself from his grief (872); and K. Hewitt, who in her article “Loss and Restitution” investigates the knight’s benefit from his poetic substitution of an image for the material lady—“White is to her lover both the lost original and its poetic replacement: she cannot be retained, but she can be known as true” (34). Arguing against any possible benefits the knight may claim from his memory and imagination, P. Hardman, in her “The Book of the Duchess as a Memorial Monument” attempts to show how the knight produces only deficient, death-laden images similar to the static statuary on medieval tombs, and in his Chaucer’s Dream Visions, M. St. John highlights the negative influences certain romantic texts have had on the mind and memory of the knight.

25 See BD 470-86.

26 This is Lynch’s gloss for say.
Trewly, the fairest companye
Of ladies that ever man with eye
Had seen togedres in o place.” (BD 805-09)

In this group of noble women is included the Lady White. Whenever she is the focus of
the knight’s discourse, he uses many words related to the properties of vision, sight,
seeing, light, color, and so on:

“Amonge these ladies thus echoon,
Sooth to seyn, I sawe oon
That was lyk noon of the route,
For I dar swere, withoute doute,
That as the sommers sonne bright
Is fairer, clerer, and hath more light
Than any other planete in hevene,
The mone or the sterres sevene,
For al the worlde so had she
Surmounted hem al of beaute.” (BD 817-26, italics mine)

And when he speaks of his sudden devotion to her, the register, again, is visual. He
claims that with this sight of the lady the god Love caught him

“So sodeinly that I ne tooke
No maner reed but at hir looke [instruction
And at myn herte; forwhy hir eyen
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen [had seen
That purely tho myn owne thought
Seyde it were bet serve hir for nought
Than with another to be wel.” (BD 839-45, italics mine)

A vocabulary of the visual so permeates the knight’s discourse in these passages that, for
the most part, other traditionally sensory-specific verbs are subordinated to the verb to
see:

“I saw hir daunce so comely,
Carole and singe so sweetly,
Laughe and pley so womanly,
And looke so debonairly,
So goodly speke and so friendly
That certes, I trow, that evermore
Nas seyn so blissful a treasore.” (BD 848-54)

The verses explain how the knight saw her dance, saw her carol, saw her sing; they do
not say that he shared her dance, heard her carol, heard her sing.28

The black knight reveals that, when his lady was alive, he perceived her in terms of
the visual. Not only was he a participant in her love; he was a spectator. This dual role
allowed the knight to occupy two spaces simultaneously. His material self existed
alongside the lady, the necessary place for a participant in a relationship. As spectator,
however, the knight occupied a space at a distance from his lady, the distance that exists
between an audience and an exhibit. To maintain this distance, the knight had to be able

28 Note also that in accordance with this emphasis, the final access to the “treasore” is sight.
to think of himself as being both intimately connected with her and yet a separate entity complete unto himself. As a separate entity, he was able to exist without a direct connection to the materiality of his lady. Thus when her material was given over to death, there remains an important component of the black knight that stands outside the deleterious effect of the decay.

Now, when she is dead, the black knight has at his disposal in his imagination the thing Alcyone so sorely lacked: a store of images by which to allay his grief. In Lady White’s material absence, he can re-create her in his mind by pulling images out of storage and arranging them into a composition of the lady, a composition that has some compensatory value in that it provides a shadow of her actual presence. In order to introduce, as it were, his lady to the dreamer, he creates a highly visual portrait. He extolls her gold-like hair; her eyes “Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde, / Simple, of good mochel, nought too wyde” (*BD* 860-61); her white, vibrant flesh; her neck “white, smothe, straight, and pure flat” (*BD* 942-43); her throat, like a “round tour of yvoire” (*BD* 946); her back; her breasts; her shoulders; her arms; her “white handes and nailes rede” (*BD* 955); her hips; and her flawless legs. Thus, in the knight’s process of remembering his lady, he is actually re-membering her, that is, putting her back together again—something that Alcyone needed to do with Seys but could not.

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29 These descriptions, which I hurry through, come from the passage of lines 855-960. The knight does not specifically mention legs but does say that there was no lack in all the limbs of the lady that were not covered with clothing (see 958-60). Also, in this section is a small group of lines (919-39) that discuss her voice and the tenor of her words. The knight is not completely affixed to the visual, then, but enough so for the purposes of my analysis.

30 Here I am following Carruthers’s account of what was thought to happen, per medieval theories of memory, when someone memorized and remembered. See especially chapter one (“Collective Memory and
In his remembering, the knight creates a type of presence to ease the shock of the complete absence of the material presence of his lady. He turns to the iconic presence of a visual representation of her held intact in his mind. Because of its mental properties, this iconic presence helps to shorten the gap of detachment for the knight. But this mechanism of comfort is not perfect. When the knight embraces his role as spectator to the remembered images of Lady White, he necessarily displays a willingness to be controlled by some elements encountered during his forays into his memory. In short, the knight has inscribed in his memory such powerful images of Lady White that now he cannot escape the influence and inscriptions they impose upon him. The knight reveals that, at one point in his youth, he was most impressionable:

“Paraventure I was therto most able
As a whyt wal or a table,
For it is redy to cache and take
Al that men wil therin make,
Whether so men wol portreye or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte.” (BD 779-84)

That was then. Now he is clothed in black. The implication is that his white wall has been so written upon by the images of his lady that now no part of the black knight’s heart or mind is still truly his own; all has been fashioned according to outside impressions or images applied to the knight. These fashionings channel the knight’s actions to such an exaggerated extent that one wonders whether the knight can truly resist the overwhelming

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*memoria rerum*”) in her *The Craft of Thought*. See also Francis A. Yates’s *The Art of Memory* 1-13, 82-104.
grief latent in the images. He is now so completely attached to these images that he says,

“And yet [still] she sit so in myn herte
That, by my troughe, I nolde noughte,
For al this worlde, out of my thought
Leve my lady; no trewly!” (BD 1108-11)

Is this a boast of his self-determined intention (“I will not leave her”), or an obliquely stated admission of inability (“I cannot leave her”? These questions arise because when the knight is forced to leave the world of his imagination to articulate the brute fact of Lady White’s death, he collapses under the pressure (and perhaps proximity) of her death. At the beginning of the dream, before any dialogue begins between the knight and the dreamer, the knight admits to himself that his lady has been taken by death, and immediately after this admission he becomes catatonic with grief. And at the very end of the dream, when the dreamer performs the similar function of yanking away the skeins of memory by asking the present whereabouts of the physical lady (“‘Sir,’ quod I, ‘where is she now?’”), the knight relapses into this paralysis: “‘Now?’ quod he, and stinte anoon. / Therwith he wex as deed as stoon” (BD 1298-1300). The relapse shows that although the knight can obtain temporary relief from his grief by visualizing his lost beloved, he cannot hold onto this relief when he is pulled away from the figures in his imagination. The psychological wall these figures provide is too porous to stem the flow of grief that still dwells in the knight.
The Narrator’s Encounter with Death

The narrator suffers a seemingly fatal sickness. This malady has robbed him of a fructuous, healthy imagination. He says that “sorwful imaginacioun / Is always hooly in my minde” (*BD* 14-15) and that he cannot sleep, which would help him regain his imagination. The first eight lines of the poem highlight the illness:

I have gret wonder, by this light
How that I live, for day ne night
I may nat slepe wel nigh nought,
I have so many an ydel thought
Purely for defaute of slepe
That, by my trouthe, I take no kepe
Of nothing, how it cometh or goth,
Ne me nis nothing leef nor loth. (*BD* 1-8)

A good sleep is necessary to the livelihood of the narrator, and insomnia is fatal because of the idle thoughts it produces. These idle thoughts, “sorwful imaginacioun,” and harmful “fantasies” (*BD* 14, 28) need to be eradicated and new, life-giving material put in their place.

Like the knight, the narrator counters death by moving away from the purely material

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31 See Kiser 4-5. See also her “Sleep, Dreams, and Poetry in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*” for an extended examination of this topic. She concurs with Spearing, who in his *Medieval Dream-Poetry* draws up the distinction between the poet’s “closed outward eyes and the clear inward sight” (7). These views are in opposition to more traditional ones that view sleep as a form of death (Brown 29; Rooney 301-310; Ferster 4, 11). Of course, as critics like Brown point out, the symbol does not have to be univocal, especially under Chaucer’s pen—sleep can mean death or it can mean insight, depending on who utilizes it (for Alcyone, for example, sleep means death).

32 See Brown 32.
dimension of the encounter to a visual imagery, that is, to an imagery that will allow for some distance between the threat and the person being threatened. The narrator does not yet know why he is as troubled as he is; he needs some time to speculate upon possible causes for his malady, and he needs some instructive material that will lend him metaphors to categorize his illness. In turning to a body of classical stories, he reaches in effect for a store of metaphors, and in reading Alcyone’s story, he accepts and stores fodder for his visual imaginary that he will later use in constructing representative images of his own grief.

Indirectly, however, the narrator begins at once to exert a sort of control or ownership over the images he receives from the book. Unlike the knight, who admits that the images he replays in his mind have an overriding power on his subjectivity, the narrator can manipulate his borrowed images to the extent that they begin to represent scenarios according to his own design. His act of reading is an act of choosing images to access from the book’s storehouse, the book serving as a bank of memory for the mind (exemplifying the sense of the Latin word *lector*, “reader,” which is radically connected to *eligere*, “to pick out, choose”). Thus he modifies Alcyone’s story as told by Ovid to his own designs, choosing to shorten the account of Seys’s death—“To tellen shortly, whan that he / Was in the see thus in this wyse” (*BD* 68-69)—and to omit Alcyone’s words after she has been visited by Morpheus: “But what she seyde more in that swowe / I may nat telle yow as nowe; / It were too longe for to dwelle” (*BD* 215-17). As a result, the collage of images that had entered his mind via the reading of the Alcyone story is now being remembered in a selective way that he controls.
This process of reading is the first successful countering tactic that the narrator exploits to his advantage. He has, moreover, met figures of death in his readings of Alcyone’s troubles. He uses these figures in ways that reflect his own malady and allow for healing to begin. After reading about Alcyone, the narrator finally sleeps. In his dream, he meets a storyteller (the black knight), as does Alcyone (Morpheus). But in the narrator’s version, the storyteller is allowed to remain in his own environ, which, instead of the horrible sterility and hardness of Morpheus’s cave as depicted in Alcyone’s version, is represented as a lush, verdant grove full of life and order (as seen in the arrangement of the trees) (BD 395-440). In this way, the narrator subconsciously begins to design a version of Alcyone’s story that is conducive to his own healing.

The narrator uses these images to his advantage because he appropriates them as tools that he then subconsciously uses to fix his pathology. In that the images form the contours of his dream, he uses the images to form a psychological buffer for himself as he delves into his paralyzed psyche to encounter death within and master it. As he dreams, he watches a figure of himself waking up within a beautiful room full of images from classical poetry inscribed on the walls. Wonderful music comes in through the windows. This room is the figuration of the poetic tradition that the narrator has inherited and is presently, per his megrims, struggling to reopen. Here, in the dream, the room is open.

When the narrator watches the dreamed figure leap from his bed and travel out of his room on a horse, he watches the figure actually travel from the room. With its light-filled windows, its waxen-like walls inscribed with poetry, and its roof, the room is, I suggest, a
symbol for the narrator’s own head. That the dreamed figure leaves the room and travels to a secluded grove—a symbol of the heart—suggests that the core trouble of the ailing narrator is not intellectual but emotional. In the grove, the dreamed figure meets with a representation of the narrator, the black knight. That this black knight is, on one level, John of Gaunt is beyond genuine critical challenge. But the knight might also be read as the narrator’s own image, and thus designed to address more directly the immediate needs of the narrator himself. Similarities are present. Like the black knight, the narrator is frozen in a stasis of grief. Like the black knight, he is a poet—or at least he has the ability to versify. And like the black knight, the narrator as the dreamed figure spends time in a locale of wondrous bird music that he eventually gallops away from at the sounding of a hunting horn (BD 1311-15). Furthermore, identifying the two with each other helps to explain why the knight is willing to view the dreamed figure as a peer worthy to hear his innermost troubles.

Taking the dreamed figure as sharing in the identity of the black knight, one can see the following dynamic at work. The narrator—who is dreaming the dream—subconsciously creates a healthy imago of himself (the figure who awakens in the

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33 For the dreamed figure, this is the room he initially wakes up in. For the knight, this is the grove which, at the end of the poem, he leaves. The lines referring to the black knight read, “And with that worde, right anoon / They gan to strake forth. Al was doon, / For that tyme, the herte hunting. / With that, me thoughte that this king / Gan quikly hoomward for to ryde.” The “worde” referred to is the knight’s final confession that his lady is dead (BD 1309). Lynch glosses the line “They gan to strake forth,” saying “They began to blow the notes on the horn that sounded the end of the hunt” (36, n. 1).

34 If one goes so far as to grant that the knight, in fact, is a picture of Chaucer himself, certain biographical problems in the poem’s pretension to be a missive to John of Gaunt disappear. The scant beard become a reflection of Chaucer’s own semi-glabras nature, and the age of the knight (“Of the age of foure and twenty yeer” [BD 455]) moves closer to the actual possible age of Chaucer—25 if we assume that Chaucer was born on 1343 and the poem written no earlier than 1368. Chaucer’s year of birth perhaps can be moved up to 1344, which would then create an exact match between Chaucer’s age and the age of the knight, but in no case can John of Gaunt be under 28, since he was 28 when Blanche died.
magical chamber), which will serve as the narrator’s substitute while he, the narrator, begins a perilous introspection on the matrix of death within himself. Although this substitute figure is ostensibly the narrator, the identification is bracketed because the narrator dreams the figure, while the figure itself is not dreaming. This is to say, as the narrator closes his own eyes and drifts to sleep in his bed, he begins to watch a figure of himself awaken out of sleep and arise from a different bed. The narrator, then, is a spectator, and what he sees is a figure that he takes to be himself but at a distance: the narrator can always in theory assure himself that in fact the figure in the dream is not himself, but is instead a separate character.

It might be argued that the figure who meets the mourning knight is still the narrator, based on the assumption that the figure talking to the black knight is the dreamer and that the dreamer is the narrator. Almost universally, the criticism on this poem employs this identification by labeling the persona speaking before the dream the “narrator” and the persona who actually meets and speaks to the black knight as the “dreamer,” a convention that I myself have used in the earlier sections of this chapter. The identification is correct insofar as it links the narrator with the dreamer superficially, but it is incorrect if it is taken to signify a plenary identification, for the word *dreamer* must be defined as “one who dreams,” and yet the figure discoursing with the black knight is not dreaming. In fact, he is the *dreamed* figure.

The narrator and the dreamed figure are intricately connected, of course, in the mesh of the overall self that is the entity responsible for the construction of the poem. This overarching unity is revealed first in the lines that transition from the narrator to the
dreamed figure:

I hadde unnethe that word y-sayde
Right thus as I have told it yow,
That sodeynly, I niste how,
Swich a lust anoon me tooke
To slepe, that right upon my booke
I fil aslepe, and therwith even
Me mette so inly swete a sweven
[. . . . . . . . .]
Me thoughte thus: that it was May,
And in the dawning I lay,
Me met thus, in my bed al naked,
And looked forth, for I was waked
With smale foules a grete hepe
That had affrayed me out of my slepe
Thurgh noyse and sweetnesse of hir songe. (BD 270-76, 291-97)

Before the dream begins, the pronoun I refers to the narrator; once the dream begins, the I refers to the figure active in the dream, but not necessarily to a self fully identical to the dreaming narrator. The disconnect inherent between the narrator and the dream-self is manifested in the reception of data and the creation of action based on that data. The narrator shuts his eyes and thus blocks the entry of external images, and he lays his body down on his bed, ceasing intentional and conscious action to become the dreaming
narrator. The dream-self, on the other hand, opens his eyes to receive rarified sensory data and picks his body up from his bed.

This dreamed figure’s psychological position is removed from the narrator because of the dream barrier situated between the narrator and the dreamed figure. This dream barrier is precisely the phenomenon that allows the narrator to get up close in order to anatomize death, to stare at the threat, to know the enemy without being overwhelmed by the enemy’s power. This spectating posture enforces the notion that the diseased self is in fact an “Other” and thus not really part of the self that watches. The knight and Alcyone never successfully carry out this othering. It is absent completely in Alcyone’s account.

When the knight remembers himself taking part in his former interactions with Blanche, it is essentially an identical, earlier version of his present self that he remembers. He was younger and happier, to be sure, but he is still the same person. Thus the grief that comes to this happier version of the knight, who is held in the knight’s memory, travels to the emotional center of the knight himself, as he remembers.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, to counter the images of death that the narrator must access on the road to health, he is already engaging a tactic that it is more sophisticated and efficient than the countering technique employed by the knight. He posits a full return to health, for the imago he creates of himself in his dream is completely healthy and is thus an optative expression of what the ailing narrator hopes to become. He locates his disease in an external carrier, and then, taking advantage of the emerging structures of spectation, he
analyzes death’s operations from a distance. In this manner, the narrator learns about the mechanisms of death so that he can eventually appropriate the activity of dying to his own advantage. But there is also another tactic at play, one that proves the narrator to be superior to the knight and Alcyone in matters of defending oneself from death. This is the tactic of introducing a psychological gulf into the space between the spectator of death and death itself.

A barrier is in place as the narrator dreams.35 This barrier is the dreamscape itself. As long as the narrator can position a figure of himself within the dream in order to approach death on a surreal level, the realities of the dangers of death are more or less shelved. Once the narrator wakes up, the damaging effect of the encounter will be localized upon the dreamed figure, and the narrator can always posit that since his awake self is different from his dreamed self in the same way that a real grove is different from the grove he dreamed about, the effects of death do not now touch him.

Dreams, however, cannot be manufactured at will. The narrator’s dream is presented in the text as a sort of miracle, which would imply that, when awake, the narrator does not have this oneiric defense at his beck and call. What is needed is a more reliable, more consistently available, version of his dream. This version comes about when the narrator chooses to record in an external text the experiences and images of the dream rather than simply confine them to the interior spaces of his memory. The narrator writes a text. His writing is an act of enveloping the spectacle of death with a stabilized, objectified code of

35 Two important works that touch on the dream barrier in relation to the placement and displacement of the dreamer’s self are J. Ferster’s “Intention and Interpretation,” especially the first half, and Brown’s “On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions,” passim. Outstanding larger works that simply cannot be ignored concerning this topic are A. C. Spearings’s Medieval Dream Poetry, whose first chapter is very helpful in laying theoretical groundwork, and S. Kruger’s more recent Dreaming in the Middle Ages.
inscription so that the fluctuating images that take on a vibrant, vivid quality in the unrestricted playing field of the memory become crystallized in a text separate from the memory. The act of inscription, then, is an act of transferral: images are moved from the psyche and placed outside it, into a text that is easily and empirically verified as being separate from the narrator himself.

To hold the images only in one’s memory is to be open to continual imaginary reformations of the encounter with death. These reformations renew the grief. To the extent that the knight attempts to construct and manipulate his recollections of his lady by versifying her, he escapes his grief. But because he never produces a permanent copy of his poetry, he reencounters his grief anew when his imagination moves away from the oral construction and toward a new version of the memories of loss. Consequently, he is trapped in a cycle of remembrance, grief, counter-grief, and new remembrance. This cycle is a psychological stasis writ large, a stasis that is mirrored in his posture. For the majority of the account he is motionless, sitting against the oak. On the other hand, the narrator, once he wakes up, can depend upon the psychological division that separates the dream from reality to block the negative emotions experienced in the dream. When the dreamed figure meets the black knight, the knight’s grief threatens to overwhelm the figure’s emotions: “And whan I herde him tell this tale / Thus pitously, as I yow telle, / Unnethe mighte I lenger dwelle, / It dide myn hert so moche wo” (BD 710-13). But when the narrator awakens to reflect upon the dream, he can look at the struggle between death and the black knight and be curious about it, not grieved. Twice he highlights his curiosity—“Me mette so inly swete a sweven, / So wonderful” and “Thought I, ‘This is
so queynt a sweven” (BD 276-77, 1330).

This ending of the poem shows that the narrator is troubled no more by an idle imagination. This interpretation is not one all critics agree with. Michael D. Cherniss and Kathleen Hewitt have seen the ending as anything but a signal of the narrator’s return to health.36 They point to the fact that when the narrator has read Alcyone’s story, he says, “I ferde the worse al the morwe / After, to thinken on hir sorwe” (BD 99-100). Directly after he finishes reading Alcyone’s story, he makes his playful vow, falls asleep, and then dreams of the black knight (BD 230-75). And at the end of the dream, he awakes and says,

Thought I, “This is so queynt a sweven [dream] That I wol, by processe of tyme, Fonde to putte this sweven in ryme [Attempt] As I can best, and that anoon.” (BD 1330-33)

These lines are apparently spoken directly after the narrator had dreamt of the black knight. Therefore, the “morwe” during which the narrator “ferde the worse” after reading about Alcyone story must occur in time after these last lines are spoken. Critics who reason along these lines assert that the narrator must still be suffering from his malady after the dream and, presumably, after he writes the poem. This observation has been made most notably by Bertrand H. Bronson’s famous PMLA essay “The Book of the Duchess Re-opened”:

We meet him [the narrator], first, engulfed in brooding melancholy, sleepless with

36 Specifically, Cherniss 115 and Hewitt 23.
“sorwful ymagynacioun.” It is, we notice, his recent condition that he is describing, not a state of mind from which he has fortunately escaped. [ . . . ] [T]he strange dream that he experienced recently, and that he intends to describe, was only an interruption. The dream is thus framed by, or suspended in, the Dreamer’s own melancholy, into which he must be understood to have lapsed again upon awaking.” (868)

If this interpretation may be credited, then the encounter with the black knight and the process of writing have not really granted the narrator any more success at countering death than has the process of extempore remembrance for the knight.

It should be noted, however, that this argument assumes either that the narrator wrote the whole poem directly after (“anoon”) he awoke from his dream about the black knight but before he worried about Alcyone the day after, or that the narrator’s dream should itself be the cure for his malady. But the narrator did not have to have written out the poem right after he awoke from his dream. Days—weeks, even—may have passed between the poem’s penultimate line “As I can best, and that anoon,” and its last line: “This was my sweven; now it is doon.” The “anoon” betokens a hopeful “I’ll get to it right away” attitude, but it is not necessarily the case that when someone expresses this intent, the achievement of the thing follows right away.

In the narrator’s case, I suggest that at least a “morwe” passed between the expressed intention of writing and the writing itself. The narrator says that he will record his dream as a poem “by process of tyme.” This phrase suggests that the narrator does not complete the poem immediately after waking from the dream. Time passes, and then he starts to
write. The narrator’s imitation of the knight’s attempt to glance away from the unproductive, death-dealing content of his plaint in order to be diverted into an alternative, creative focus—the making of rhyme and meter—must have indeed cured the narrator.

As the narrator begins to write, his cure would begin to develop. If the cure is in the writing itself, an act that would externalize the psychological threats of the narrator’s illness by imposing order upon them and then locking them up within a simulacrum of the narrator (the black knight), it (the cure) cannot be fully developed at the beginning of the poem. It would have matured in the process, toward the middle or the end. The nature of the maturation process would explain why at the beginning of the poem the narrator is still troubled. At the end of the poem, his troubles apparently are gone.

The very fact that the poem is given an ending (“now it is doon”) implies that the narrator recognized its wholeness, a fact that in turn implies the narrator’s imagination is now capable both of creating an entity (the poem) that is complete in itself, and of recognizing the boundaries that constitute that completeness. On the narrator’s part, these newfound capacities represent a progression toward the order and constructiveness that mark a healthy imagination, not a reversion to the idleness and chaos that marked his imagination at the beginning of the poem. The countering process has ended, death has been staved off, and the narrator can assume his life-filled identity once more.
Chapter 2

Imagining a Good Death: More’s *Dialogue of Comfort* and the Dynamics of the Public Gaze

The narrator of *Book of the Duchess* has a malady within himself that threatens to kill him. He effectively counters the threat by creating a setting—the poem itself—within which he can assume the posture of a spectator. He (the narrator/dreamer) watches a figure of himself (the dreamed figure) deal with the malady in personified form (the black knight). These removes buffer any noxious effect a close examination of the malady might have. Thomas More, on the other hand, faces a mortal threat from without: execution for refusing to recognize King Henry VIII as the divine head of England. Instead of positioning himself as a spectator of his own death, More accepts the onus of being a spectacle. By publically figuring himself as a saint about to experience martyrdom, More enrolls himself in a holy drama of sorts, that is, a script of dying that his audience already would be familiar with by virtue of their Catholic faith. Once More begins this self-fashioning with his prison treatise *The Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, the audience’s pressure of expectation would help him remain in role to the end. In this way, More appropriates and controls the spectacle of his own execution.
More’s Execution

In October 25, 1529, Sir Thomas More became Lord Chancellor of England, taking over the spot from Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Wolsey had fallen from grace over the question of the annulment of Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon. One biographer has supposed that Henry elevated More “to move him to incline to his side” concerning this matter. After consulting others about the marriage issue, More did not so incline, but Henry apparently could tolerate More’s reluctance to kowtow about the divorce issue and ceased to pressure More. However, as the relations between Henry and the Pope grew more tense and more public, and as Henry began to carry his course to its logical extremes, More eventually found himself involved. In May 1532, Henry ordered eight lords, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and twelve of the House’s members to revise the oath that the Anglican clergy swore in their ordination, an oath that declared allegiance to the Pope in spiritual matters. Henry wanted this allegiance to be sworn to him. During this same time, the king proposed to Parliament a restriction upon the powers of the bishops to seize and punish heretics. The bishops opposed Henry, as would be expected, but so did More. His objections to this proposal were established upon the same grounds as his tacit objection to the King’s divorce and remarriage: the action was an encroachment upon papal authority in England. The king was granted the

37 Roper qtd. in Reynolds 227.
38 More wrote to Thomas Cromwell, “Whereupon the King’s Highness being further advertised [. . .] of my poor opinion in the matter (wherein to have been able and meet to do him service I would as I then shewed his Highness have been more glad than of all such worldly commodities as I either then had or ever should come to) his Highness, graciously taking in gre [in good part] my good mind in that behalf, used of his blessed disposition in the prosecuting of his great matter only those [. . .] whose conscience his Grace perceived well and fully persuaded upon that part. And as well myself as any other to whom his Highness thought the thing to seem otherwise, he used in his other business” (More, Last 52).
 Trouble for More started afresh in 1534. He had been associated with the Nun of Kent, a dubious quasi-prophet named Elizabeth Barton. Her prophecies were deemed treasonous in November 1533, and in her confession she listed alleged confederates. Thomas More was named. He exonerated himself but could not fully dissolve the cloud of suspicion that began to form around him in the eyes of the king. Then in early 1534, Henry devised a Succession Act that would clearly place the inheritance of the throne on any male heir he and Anne might have, and, failing to have a male heir, on Princess Elizabeth. The Act also made it clear that legal or spiritual issues concerning any marriages in the realm would be resolved by clerics under the ecclesiastical direction of Henry, not the Pope. On April 13, 1534, More was called to Lambeth to take the Oath of Succession in order to show his consent to the Succession Act. There, he refused and was committed to the Tower of London. Fifteen months later he was tried for high treason, found guilty, and sentenced to death. On July 6, 1535, he was beheaded on Tower Hill.

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39. My sentencing suggests that the increasing ecclesiastical powers of the king were the reason More finally resigned, this proposal to limit the bishops being only a final straw of sorts. But More’s resignation is not so easy to read. He had documentation to show that he had developed a chronic pleurisy that was getting worse, apparently due to the stress of his duties. This excuse of sickness may have been legitimate but also overplayed in order to serve as an excuse to vacate an office that was becoming increasingly onerous to More’s conscience. Apparently More’s household entered into penury (if the historian/hagiographer Roper can be trusted—see Roper 49-50) upon his resignation; one wonders if poverty would have been embraced on account of a pleurisy, especially if More took the office in the first place in order to provide for his family (see Reynolds 257).

40. One biographer asks: “Why was More called so early to take the oath? He was not a Member of Parliament; he was no longer a Councillor; he held no official position. Yet, as far as the records show, he seems to have been the only layman called before the Commissioners on 13 April, more than a fortnight before the Act came into force. [. . .] The king must have felt it desirable to get this leading layman to set an example to others” (Reynolds 299).
The Purpose of the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*

In the months in the Tower, More wrote what has come to be known as his Tower Works. These include his last letters (totaling at least twenty-four), the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (henceforth, *Dialogue of Comfort*), *A Treatise upon the Passion*, *A Treatise to Receive the Blessed Body of Our Lord*, *De Tristitia Christi* (*The Sadness of Christ*), and a small collection of moralizations and prayers titled *Devout Instructions and Prayers*. The *Dialogue of Comfort*, the focus of this essay, was written during the first part of More’s imprisonment. It is composed of three books; each one is a dialogue between an elderly man named Anthony and his young relation Vincent. Rational and distanced, the first book defines tribulation and categorizes its different types. The second book employs a much more personal tone to provide jocular illustrations of people’s various experiences with persecution. The third book, using a grim, corporeal register, examines the types of torturous persecutions a good man might undergo at the hands of those who want to cause him to fall from goodness. Throughout the treatise Anthony stresses that a man’s faithfulness to God and to God’s causes will give him the strength to endure to the end.

When the question is asked of why the *Dialogue of Comfort* was written, some answers are obvious. Clearly, one reason More wrote the work was to comfort other Catholics in England. He wanted to persuade the persecuted faithful that God’s promises

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41 This work was at least partially written before More entered the Tower. It is often grouped with the Tower Works, however, because “it is thematically and spiritually linked to the others in this group, in which the Passion of Christ and More’s attempt to imitate Christ are of major importance” (Haupt xi).

42 It is generally agreed that the work was written between May 1534 and the early months of the year 1535 (Fox 223). Leland Miles believes the work was probably finished by November 1534 (Introduction, xxix; “With a Coal?” 438-39).
were reliable and that in a time of political upheaval, they, the Catholics, should be faithful as well, even to the point of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{43} His other Tower Works, most obviously \textit{De Tristitia Christi}, provide overt comfort and encouragement to an external Catholic readership that is at the brink of facing its own persecutions for the faith.\textsuperscript{44} For example, \textit{De Tristitia Christi}, in which both the author More and the character Christ directly address the reader numerous times, seems especially designed to build up the courage of future Catholic martyrs.\textsuperscript{45} It is also clear that More wrote the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} to comfort himself, mainly by reiterating to himself the fundamental truths of Catholicism. Thus, critics have argued that More wrote to convince himself that God can strengthen a faithful man in the hour of trial or that death for a good man, even a violent death, is in fact a blessing in disguise.\textsuperscript{46}

These latter views fail, however, to adequately situate their conclusions against certain historical and political questions. If More wrote the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} primarily for himself, why then was it smuggled out of the Tower sections at a time?\textsuperscript{47}

Why was its narrative so universalized and so historically displaced that a politically

\textsuperscript{43} See Russell 41; Manley in Martz and Manley cxx-clxiii; Purcell 99-102; Harpsfield 133; and Hallett v.

\textsuperscript{44} As Martz puts it in his \textit{Thomas More: The Search for the Inner Man}, “One has the sense that when, for example, More is writing his account of his interrogation at Lambeth, he is interested not only in sending a clear account of what happened to his daughter Margaret and thus to his family. He is also taking the occasion to clarify and stake out his position to anyone who might happen to read the letter” (55).

\textsuperscript{45} Seymour Baker House, in his “A Martyr’s Theology of Assent,” points out, “In over a dozen places, More has Jesus himself address the reader in speeches ranging from a few lines to nearly a hundred. While this technique is also found in More’s sources, he takes it to new lengths. […] More’s intent, of course, is to assist the martyr to muster at the very least faith sufficient to ‘take hold’ of Christ’s promises, without which effort the succour of grace cannot flow” (59-60).

\textsuperscript{46} Perhaps More provided this self-comfort by writing to strengthen his imagination in order to replace his images of physical torture (which, given More’s notorious fear of pain, could only trouble him) with images of Christ’s passion and the Christian’s rewards. See Billingsley, “Resources” 66; Martz in Martz and Manley lxxvii; Martz 81; Manley in Martz and Manley cxx, cxlx-xlx; and Lakowski 217-18.

\textsuperscript{47} On the work’s being smuggled out of the Tower and the signatures’ being read separately, and thus unbound, see Miles, “More’s \textit{Dialogue}” 132-33; Miles, Introduction civ; Chambers 306; and Martz in Martz and Manley xx.
naïve sixteenth-century reader might believe that it was actually a transcript of a real conversation between two Turks that had been translated by More? Why are the propositions made so oblique, if one would expect them to proffer comfort directly to More’s situation? In fact, why was it penned at all? More’s cognitive faculties certainly were such that he could have arrived at the same conclusions drawn up in the treatise by acts of pure concentration or pietistic meditation.

Because these questions have been ignored, many critics who claim More wrote mainly for himself have failed to consider how More’s strategy of private consolation in his prison writing might have depended upon a certain amount of publicity More expected his writing to receive. Counting on his text’s circulation, More turns the persecutory event to his own advantage by using the public gaze that comes from a publicized trial, imprisonment, and execution. He wished to produce a representation of himself that would transcend a physical death. More’s book accomplishes this re-formation of More’s public image by training his audience how to interpret the political scene as a spiritual scene. Counting on this shift in interpretation, More draws a self-portrait that will be fleshed out by his activity in his trial and execution. This portrait bears resemblance to the accounts housed in his audience’s imaginary of holy martyrs, causing More to be seen quite naturally as a martyr. Thus More scripts a martyr’s death,

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48 See Miles, Introduction xxvi-xxx; Miles, “The ‘Dialogue of Comfort’” passim; Miles, “Patristic” passim; Schuster 39-42; Purcell 90-91; Norland 56-57; Strauss 1, 70; Himelick 60.

49 One critic suggests that although the Dialogue of Comfort is indeed a convincing argument for God’s sovereignty over earthly matters, yet something is missing: “[T]his confidence, that God had somehow brought him [More] to this position, by itself offered little encouragement to bear the physical trials that lay ahead. Largely intellectual, such confidence did not obliterate the fear in and of itself. What More needed to find [...] and what he did not fully explore in The Dialogue of Comfort was a rhetoric of assent that acknowledged the overwhelming horror of a torturous death even as it offered a convincing rationale for undergoing it” (House 54).
uses the *Dialogue of Comfort* and other prison writings to disseminate this new image of himself and the promise of martyrdom, and then enacts it before the people’s gaze. In order to play the role of the martyr to the end, More had to be able to accept calmly his intense persecution. This need to commit to staying in role, buttressed by the pressure of being watched (the audience’s gaze), steadies More in the face of death, providing him personally with strength and comfort. Thus, a use of the public gaze becomes More’s countering technique in his encounter with death. In the end, it does not enable him to escape physical death, but it does enable him to infuse his death with new meaning and value and to gain psychological strength to meet the ordeal head on.

**The Public Gaze**

By the phrase *public gaze*, I mean the shared imaginary that functions like a public storehouse of images and figures by which a community remembers past persons and events, fleshes out new ones, and sketches out future ones. For a collective audience, this storehouse, this lore, when complemented with abstract explanation, becomes over time the group’s history, its memory. It is not a discrete, crystallized cluster of concepts, but is instead a conglomerate of images and notions that are constantly being fashioned and refashioned, and it will continue to be so worked as it (the *imaginary*) develops diachronically within a culture. In its essence, the public gaze is a way of looking and of reading. The dynamics of the gaze necessitate a constant influx into the imaginary of new images, and thus of new recordings of events. The fact that it must incorporate the new objects of the gaze means that slowly it is affected by what it views and that it changes
accordingly.

In creating a correspondence between the phrase public gaze and the term imaginary, I am suggesting that the imaginary is a type of seeing in the mind. Because the imaginary is carried in the mind, it must deal with representations, or signs. One sees with a deeper level of the imaginary when he or she understand the signage of cultural lore—the communal memories of a people’s history—in terms of their interpretations. A cluster of people who continually read certain sights in certain ways forms a community. Furthermore, a community will choose to recall certain signs and the accepted interpretations of those signs in order to foreground the part of the imaginary that serves

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50 I am using the word signs synonymously with representations. The sentence the sign signifies means the same as the sentence the representation represents. The representation may represent something as a picture represents the object it is a picture of or as a footprint represents the presence of a human being. The necessary quality is simply that the representation by definition points away from itself to that which it represents.

51 I agree with A. P. Cohen’s assertions that a community “does not consist in social structure or in ‘the doing’ of social behavior” but rather that community grounds itself “in ‘the thinking’ about it” (Cohen 98). Cohen continues: “Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with the geographic or sociographic assertions of ‘fact’. By extension, the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms” (98). Peter Womack, in his “Imagining Communities,” makes a similar point, but about a nation, a much larger community than that which I will deal with in this paper. Referencing Shakespeare’s Henry V, especially its “self-conscious cultivation of ‘imaginary puissance,’” he says the audience “is asked to conceive of a positive imaginary entity. This entity can, I think, be named very simply: it is England. Imaginary in the sense, expounded by Benedict Anderson, that a nation ‘is imagined because the members even of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’” (93). Other works that develop this notion of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communities founded on an imaginary are Stephen Greenblatt’s Shakespearean Negotiations (especially his Chapter Two, “Invisible Bullets”), Greenblatt’s “The Improvisation of Power,” Stephen Orgel’s “The Role of King,” Graham Holderness’s “What Ish My Nation?: Shakespeare and National Identities,” and Louis Adrian Montrose’s “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture.” For an interesting read about how maps as signs blur the boundaries between the real (as revealed by sight and measurement) and the imaginary, see Bernhard Klein’s Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland, especially parts II and III. Linda Tarte Holley’s Chaucer’s Measuring Eye (see chapter four, “The Borders of Narrative”) develops the idea of the visual frame and its hermeneutical role. I will apply to the sixteenth century principles of sight and reading that she applies to the late fourteenth century.
the particular needs of the community at that time.\textsuperscript{52} In this way a community can approach its visual field with a visual frame through which it sees things and by which it assigns meaning and value. The frame enables a metaphysical reading to emerge that often corrects or realigns the gaze of the audience in accordance with truths seen on a deeper level.\textsuperscript{53}

Finally, by \textit{audience} I mean people who are participating in the public gaze and are simultaneously aware (or can be made aware) of their status as spectators. The ability to acknowledge the truth of the proposition “I am looking at x” while looking at x necessitates the ability to transcribe x from sensory data into a cognitive sign recognized by the mind, and this cognitive sign into a verbal sign articulated by the mind. The process is from object-seen, to image-held-in-the-mind, to word-articulated-by-the-mind. The assigning by the mind of a name to the object sighted is a necessary part of this process of transcription, or, rather, translation. The name acts not only as a mediator

\textsuperscript{52} As Cohen puts it, “History is wonderfully malleable [. . .]. Even without the intention to distort, its recollection always rests upon interpretive reconstructions” (101). Cohen might be uncomfortable with my equating his \textit{History} with my \textit{imaginary}, but I believe the fundamental qualities of the one are the fundamental qualities of the other and so am treating the terms as rough synonyms.

\textsuperscript{53} In her critique of Norman Klassen’s \textit{Chaucer on Love, Knowledge and Sight}, Susan Stanbury repeatedly makes the point that in some late Middle English literature, a physical way of seeing was in tension with a metaphysical way of seeing: “Visual experience in the Middle English \textit{Pearl} works similarly to trace the incommensurability between human and divine love, but in entirely different terms. Vision occurs through and against human sight, the penetrating sight of Jerusalem both enabled and hindered by the gaze of human love” (202) and “Oddly, the readings [in Klassen’s text] in fact share a more coherent argument than Klassen articulates, for they repeatedly argue that Chaucer uses vision to document the limitations of human sight” (203). And in her own book \textit{Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception}, Stanbury hints toward this dynamic of the corrective gaze in her observation, “On the one hand, characters choose to act according to what they know, their choices constrained in part by those sensory fields detailed through description. On the other hand, the audience, which sees through the focalized gaze of the fictional witness [of the poetic narrator], also brings to the text a broader view, one that can visualize a wider panorama than the pilgrim can see and, on a thematic level, one that can guess at consequences and at the moral or spiritual ramifications of a character’s choices” (5). The audience here would is analogous to what I am calling “community” in my own analysis, their wiser view challenging the view of the culturally anomalous individual, or his or her anomalous reading of a visual scene.
between the object-in-itself and the mind reflecting on the object but also as a representation of the object. The visual, then, is exchanged for the verbal: the collection of phenomena that was once taken to be the object of sight is now recognized as a representation in itself and is then converted into a name or a word description in order to enter the economy of communication at work in the community. Consequently, the public gaze creates a space for a text.\(^{54}\)

The public gaze also creates a space for performance. The person who knows he or she is being watched knows that he or she is being turned into a representation by the audience and being interpreted according to a hermeneutical frame. More often than not, this knowledge introduces a fissure throughout the object being viewed—on one hand is the self that believes itself fully known only to itself (the inner, private identity of the person) and on the other hand is the image of itself that this inner self begins to fashion for viewing. If the person wants to disclose his or her core values to the public, he or she can highlight, emphasize, or even exaggerate the performance of actions that betoken those values. Among other things, one can create a superlative version of oneself and present this to its audience. As a superlative image of the self is presented to and accepted by the audience, the core self may feel a pressure to actually conform to the identity

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\(^{54}\) Holley, too, points this out, but of an earlier culture than More’s: “In fact, the science of seeing in Chaucer’s day operates in four areas of experiment or speculation: physiological (the physiognomy of the eye), physical (the measuring of the force of light rays), epistemological (cognitive theory, that is, how do we know truly?), and metaphysical (linking physical vision with perception of the Divine). By a natural extension, optical theory defines epistemology or cognitive theory and leads to consideration of the connection between words and images. If our vision is determined by powers of reasoning (perception), then language, as the index to reason, manifests the image. [. . .] It is the ‘expression’ of what we know to be true that extends visual theory to the verbal arts and draws semantics and vision together” (17).
More and the Public Gaze

It is not tenuous to suppose More was familiar with the dynamics of the public gaze, its effects on an audience, and its provisions for performance. Perhaps a habit of considering action as spectacle was even engrained in him, for these elements of gazing are essentially some of the same elements of the stage. The young More was noted for his proclivity toward drama. While living as a page in the household of Cardinal Morton, More at least once spontaneously ventured, as one biographer put it, to “stepp in among the Christmas players, and forthwith, without any other forethinking or premeditation, playe a part with them himselfe, so fitly, so plausibly and so pleasantly, that the Auditours tooke muche admiration, and more comfort and pleasure thereof then of all the players besides.” More may have written short plays in his youth, perhaps even while in

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55 David Aers, introducing the collection *Culture and History 1350-1600*, quotes at length from C. Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). I find the material apt, as it supports this idea of the self’s identity being built by a communication between the individual and the culture: “[O]ne cannot be on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages and self-understanding—and, of course, those classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocution’. It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of ‘identity’, offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. The full definition of someone’s identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community” (Aers 1).

56 I stress that this engaging by More did not have to happen consciously. The various facets and implications of the public gaze were so foundationally engrained in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English periods of the Tutors and the Stewarts that someone as embedded in the culture as More was might very well act within this schema with such ease and familiarity that the operational principles at work would pass by him unnoticed.

57 Harpsfield 11.
the Cardinal’s household. One of his earlier prose works was the *History of King Richard III*. At least two critics have noted the play-like structure of the work, one going so far as to claim the history “was really a disguised play, dominated by great chunks of dialogue and by sentences which are often more stage direction than exposition.” This dramatic turn has been noted in some of More’s other works as well.

Another reason to assume that the concepts of the gaze are at play in More’s work—perhaps the main reason—is that More lived in an age where the public gaze, the imaginary, and the concept of an audience were regularly employed to communicate values and judgments. In general, Early Modern England prized the pageant, the theater, and the masque, none of which was separated from political functions. Henry VIII and his court delighted in tournaments, revels, mummings, and spectacular court entertainment. Probably the most enduring and popularly engaging of these political spectacles was the civic pageant. Civic pageants usually existed for the monarch’s viewing, especially during the king’s progress through the English counties and cities. The annual installation of the Lord Mayor of London, however, affirmed the city’s power and existed specifically for the gaze of the city’s public. This particular pageant would have taught common Londoners how to read a pageant—what to look for, how symbols functioned, how the order of things had meaning, how to recognize itself as a viewing

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58 “More’s first compositions in dialogue may have been the ‘little plays’ that Erasmus reports More wrote as a youth, one of them presumably the *comedian de Salemone* that More mentions in a letter to John Holt” (Norland 53).

59 Miles, “Literary Artistry” 11. Miles further states: “[I]n his mature works, he [More] again went out of his way and again to use dramatic techniques. This applies to *Utopia* and even to the *Dialogue concerning Tyndale*, where More argues with a Messenger who has been contaminated with Lutheranism. Such evidence confirms Chamber’s assertion that ‘More’s dramatic talent . . . could not be suppressed’” (19-20). See also Kincaid’s “Dramatic Structure,” passim.

60 See Palmer 114-15; Bergeron, “Middleton’s *No Wit*” 67; Orgel, *Illusions* 8; Owens 27.

61 See Anglo 98-123; Ridley 43-46, 88.
audience, and, as such, what expectations were proper to develop and entertain before viewing a pageant.\(^{62}\) In fact, the eclectic nature of such pageantry educated the English public on the general form of a pageant and gave them a template that could be instantiated with different symbols depending upon the occasion and the theme.\(^{63}\) Consequently, the pageant became even more malleable over time, its form being applied to various other state ceremonies and events. A particular analogue was, of course, the public execution, which served in Early Modern England an important role in informing the people of the emerging state’s power.\(^{64}\)

The concepts of the public gaze were thus plausibly foundational to More’s way of thinking. This assumption has explanatory power in an analysis of More’s *Dialogue of Comfort*. In the Tower More was an object of a public gaze. Henry intended him as such an object in order to signify his far-reaching power to implement and validate the Oath of Succession.\(^{65}\) If Henry could not claim More’s genuine allegiance, he would claim More’s body, something he *could* claim as the ultimate owner of everything material in his realm. The execution itself was to be a collage of signs implicating More, communicating his guilt first by image (the public spectacle) and then by interpretation (the public meanings of the forms of punishments). The interpretation would be guided by an established ideology that sought to explain the origin of moral deviance in the material locus of the body. For example, according to the typical protocol, a traitor was to be dragged on a litter to the place of execution and hanged until half-dead. The genitals

\(^{62}\) See Bergeron, *English* 3, 6; Orgel, *Illusions* 11, 16.
\(^{63}\) See Palmer 114, 117.
\(^{64}\) As one historian put it, “The practice of public physical punishment was a characteristic of the early modern personalistic stage of state formation” (Spierenburg 109). See also Amussen 6-7.
\(^{65}\) Ridley 238.
were to be cut off. Next, the bowels were to be pulled from the belly and slowly burned. Then the traitor’s body was to be dismembered. Why? Sir Edward Coke, the attorney general of England during whose tenure the ill-fated Gunpowder Plot was bungled, explained that the criminal is
drawn to the place of execution from his prison as being not worthy any more to tread upon the face of the earth whereof he was made: also for that he hath been retrograde to nature, therefore is he drawn backward at a horse-tail. And whereas God hath made the head of man the highest and most supreme part, as being his chief grace and ornament, [ . . . ] he must be drawn with his head declining downward, and lying so near the ground as may be, being thought unfit to take the common air. For which case also he shall be strangled, being hanged up by the neck between heaven and earth, as deemed unworthy of both, or either; as likewise, that the eyes of men may behold, and their hearts condemn him. Then is he to be cut down alive, and to have his privy parts cut off and burnt before his face as being unworthily begotten, and unfit to leave any generation after him. His bowels and inlay’d parts taken out and burnt, who inwardly had conceived and harbored in his heart such horrible treason. After, to have his head cut off, which had imagined the mischief. And lastly his body to be quartered, and the quarters set up in some high and eminent place, to the view and detestation of men, and to become a prey for the fowls of the air.  

More was aware of the semiotic charge built into his upcoming execution; while writing

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66 Coke qtd. in Amussen 6-7.
the *Dialogue of Comfort*, he was under the impression that he would be drawn and quartered. He diffused this charge by reorienting the audience away from the political frame propagated by Henry’s regime and toward a spiritual frame of his (More’s) own making.

**More’s Use of the Gaze in the *Dialogue of Comfort***

The audience to the execution would soon have to interpret More’s death, that is, translate it in the sense of moving it from one structure of meaning into a different one. Perhaps this need is why More brings up the matter of translation immediately in the *Dialogue of Comfort*. His complete title of the work reads *A Dialoge of Comfort agaynst Trybulacion, Made by an Hungaryen in Laten, & Translatyd out of Laten into French, & out of French into Englysh*.\(^{67}\) In playing along with this fashioned lineage of transmission, one can suppose that the alleged Hungarian took the images and events experienced in his own imaginary (images and events he first interpreted by means of an Hungarian visual frame), and situated them into an imaginary surrounded by a Latin frame. The identity of the images and events, then, is nuanced and changed. Someone supposedly took this Latinized bundle of Hungarian signs and representations and gave them a structure girded by a French frame, shifting their essence of identity even more. Finally, the metamorphosis was complete when the representations came to rest within the English lexicon. Consequently, any part of this treatise that was uniquely

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\(^{67}\) Although some editions of the treatise do not carry More’s complete title, the most authoritative edition, the Yale edition by Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley, does. Aside from the one I am here attempting to give, I have yet to find a satisfying explanation as to why More creates this double remove.
“Hungarian,” in that the signs used to represent the events found their full expressions only in the Hungarian register, has now been lost; any part of the “Latinized version” of the Hungarian experience that found *its* fullest expressions only in the Latin lexicon has been lost; and so on. Only a naïve English reader could seriously entertain the notion that what was being read was a faithful representation of Hungarian experience and interpretation. Rather, pressure is on the reader to accept the narrative as it has been fashioned by English figures and tropes. What is left is an Anglicized version of the Hungarians. This version makes it easy for the English reader to apply to English objects what is read about othered, Hungarian ones.

Models for reinterpretation do occur throughout the *Dialogue of Comfort*. Tribulation and persecution are really wholesome medicine (24-26); tribulation is not a bad thing but is instead a sign that one is God’s child (41) because it is “a gracious gift of God, a gift that He specially gave His special friends” (61); this world is no home for a Christian but is instead a “vale of labor, toil, tears, and misery” designed to get one to look to heaven as a true home (39); all men are beggars, even the richest and the most richly appareled (123). These models become especially numerous toward the end of the treatise. For example, More through Anthony says the Turk is nothing in himself but is God’s “sorrowful scourge of correction over evil Christian people that should be faithful” (148). Money, land, and wealth are really “thorns and briars that strangle the word of God which has been sown in our hearts (184). This whole world is a prison, and every human being is really a prisoner with God as the chief jailer (191-208). Death is not a

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68 See also Anthony’s insistence that the Turk is only a shadow (More, *Dialogue of Comfort* 237).
terrible thing but instead is a precious passage: “Precious is in the sight of God the death of His saints” (214). Running from worldly shame will lead one only into the real, actual shame of God’s disapproval, of which worldly shame is but a shadow (215).

A different approach in modeling the process of reinterpretation occurs in the jocular Book 2 of the *Dialogue of Comfort*. This book performs a crucial function in aligning More’s audience with his own understanding of his predicament. Laughter, which is what the merry tales promise, is more than just an attention-getting device. It is a sign of community and of agreement on a profound level. Laughter operates at a visceral level, deeper than that of conscious deliberation. Laughter is an unpremeditated, spontaneous response revealing a certain posture toward that which is laughed at. Because of its spontaneity, laughter does not allow the one who laughs any time to determine whether or not he or she should consider the matter funny. Funniness simply happens. It captures people and “makes” them laugh. In encouraging laughter, then, More encourages his audience to embrace an interpretation presented to them in the text. Laughing with the text means that the reader has accepted the hermeneutical posture, or frame, the text is applying.

The laughter of Book 2 reveals the fact that the laughing audience has read the story two ways. The first way is the reading that aligns itself with the intentions of the character in the story, at whom the audience will eventually laugh. This character does not think the story itself funny. For example, one of the first stories in Book 2 is of a man who has decided to live loose and then, when old, to recover all spiritual benefit by uttering a pre-planned deathbed confession. This man had even picked out the very words
he would use in those last minutes. However, it so happened that “long ere he were old
his horse once stumbled upon a broken bridge. And as he labored to recover him, when
he saw it would not be, but down into the flood headlong needs he should [slide], in a
sudden fright he cried out in the falling, ‘Have all to the devil!’ And there he drowned
with his [. . .] words ere he died, whereupon his hope hung all his wretched life” (77).
This dying is obviously not funny to the man who has just died, and the audience
understands that. But, in laughing, the audience expresses allegiance to a hermeneutical
frame that renders its own reading of this story, a reading that goes past the literal level.
This is the reading that sees the intentions of this man as ridiculous and his final end as
the result of an application of justice. In having his readers laugh, More is exercising
them in the art of reading two stories in one account and in picking the story that More,
through Anthony, presents as the right one. This is fundamentally the very same thing
More will ask his audience to do when they watch his execution.69

In other ways, More provides new images to supplant the old ones in his audience’s
imaginary. The Dialogue of Comfort is fraught with commentary on the virtues of a good,

69 My argument identifies laughter in the Dialogue of Comfort as a means to an end, the end being one’s
passive commitment to a certain reading of a scene while being awareness of different readings. The
commitment is passive because the audience is made to laugh at someone’s (a character’s) wrong
interpretation (that is, wrong assignment of value and signification). Seeing More’s use of laughter as a tool
to bring about something other than laughter makes sense in light of More’s apparent disparagement in the
Dialogue of Comfort of laughter as an end in itself. Anthony seems to admit that laughter is good only as a
means to an end, although the end explicitly mentioned (that of recapturing an audience’s attention [70-71])
is different from the one I argue for. And even earlier in the work, Anthony tells Vincent, “And for to prove
that this life is no laughing time, but rather the time of weeping, we find that our Savior Himself wept twice
or thrice, but never find we that He laughed so much as once. I will not swear that He never did, but at the
least wise he left us no ensample of it. But on the other side He left us ensample of weeping” (40). The way
to heaven is paved with pain and tears, not laughter: “Would we get into His kingdom with ease when He
Himself got not into His own but by pain? His kingdom hath He ordained for His disciples, and He saith
unto us all: ‘If any man will be my disciple, let him learn at me to do as I have done, take his cross of
tribulation upon his back and follow me.’ He saith not here, ’Lo, let him laugh and make marry’” (41).
godly imagination as opposed to a worldly, devilish one. For example, Anthony inveighs against people who try to crowd out thoughts of death by cramming their minds full of delusions and delectable dreams (108, 166). He pities those who cannot comprehend or enjoy Christian truths because of “bad imagination” (188). He bemoans the fact that even the most virtuous human mind can operate only on a deficient imagination without the inspiring grace of God (230). The literal narrative of the *Dialogue of Comfort* is itself a stream of images designed to amend a straying imagination, proffering images of an old, wise, holy counselor preparing to die; a young, zealous listener eager to do what is right; a small inner sanctum devoid of superfluous worldly comfort; a landscape outside the room overrun with the perils of a deadly enemy; etc. On another level, however, runs a current of images that speak more directly of More and his political situation. More subtly focuses the gaze on himself so that his audience will begin to think of him in the very terms More provides in his work.

For instance, in Book 1, Anthony undertakes to provide a plenary categorization of the various types of persecutions a man can face. Tribulation comes to make a man repent of his sins (and thus it is called “medicinal”), or to keep a man from further sins (also called “medicinal”), or to test a faithful man in order to have him become worthy of great reward. There are certain ways a person can ascertain that he or she is suffering the third type of tribulation. One way is illustrated by the following situation:

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70 See Prescott 429 for more loci where Anthony mentions the imagination in *Dialogue of Comfort* and Billingsley, “‘Imagination’” 58 for an analysis of More’s indebtedness to Augustine’s views on a healthy imagination.

71 This graphic quality of *Dialogue of Comfort* has been noticed. Fox, in his biography, refers to the work as a “speaking picture” (238), and Dolan notes that “More’s practice as a writer can best be understood as a rhetorical effort to instill images in his readers’ memories” (Dolan vi).

72 See Book 1, Chapters 8-10.
Or [suppose] you be a judge and will have such zeal to justice that you will rather abide tribulation by the malice of some mighty man than judge wrong for his favor. Such tribulations, lo, be those that are better than only medicinal. And every man upon whom they fall may be bold so to reckon them, and in his deep trouble may well say to himself the words that Christ hath taught him for his comfort: “Blessed be the merciful men, for they shall have mercy given them. Blessed by they that suffer persecution for justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (34)

For a time, More had been the highest judge in the realm under the King, and he had disagreed with Henry concerning Henry’s disregard of the Pope’s power in England. It seems that More sets things up here so that his readers can realize that his upcoming trial and execution are his pathway to “the kingdom of heaven.”

This process of sketching a hierarchy of stations in persecution and then situating himself near or at the top is carried out by More throughout the book. A passage in Book 3 deserves full quotation for its clear structure and applicability to More, who thought he would be drawn and quartered:

For God having many mansions [. . .] in His Father’s house, exalteth not every good man up to the glory of a martyr. [He] foresee[s] their infirmity, that though they be of goodwill before and peradventure of right good courage too, would yet play Saint Peter if they were brought to the point, and thereby bring their souls

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73 Two pages earlier, More made this condition even more specific to his case: the man who faces the third type of tribulation is “whatsoever a man falleth in tribulation for the maintenance of justice, or for the defense of God’s cause” (32, italics mine).
into the peril of eternal damnation. [¶So] He provideth otherwise for them before they come thereat. [He] either findeth a way that men shall not have the mind to lay any hands upon them, as He found for His disciples when Himself was willingly taken. Or that if they set hand on them they shall have no power to hold them, as He found for Saint John the Evangelist. Which let his sheet fall from him, whereupon they caught hold, and so fled himself naked away and escaped from them. Or though they hold [them] and bring [them] to prison too, yet God sometime delivereth them thence, as He did Saint Peter. [¶] And sometime He taketh them to Him out of the prison into heaven, and suffereth them not to come to their torment at all—as he Hath done by many a good holy man. And some He suffereth to be brought into the torments and yet suffereth them not to die therein, but live many years after and die their natural death—as He did by Saint John the Evangelist and by many another more [. . .]. (186-87)

In 1534, More stood at the brink of torture. By making it so far up the ladder of martyrdom as drawn by More himself, he implicitly presented himself as a good man par excellence, one definitely worthy of “the glory of a martyr.”

Bringing himself into the text this way was not, in fact, a sudden move for More, for he had been tracing faint outlines of himself in his Dialogue of Comfort all along. Such an outline appears in many semi-autobiographical sketches that are interspersed throughout the work. My count tallies at least nine such allusions to More, his second wife Alice Middleton, his son-in-law William Roper, Cardinal Wolsey, or his ward
Margaret Giggs.\textsuperscript{74} There is also a strong resemblance in personality traits and idiosyncrasies between More and his main interlocutor in the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort}, Anthony, and not a few critics have even seen figures of More in Anthony’s younger partner in dialogue, Vincent, as well.\textsuperscript{75} One supposes that some among the audience of the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} would immediately have recognized these parallels, seeing More in some scenes in which certain qualities of Anthony and Vincent are highlighted. Through these characters More communicated values and beliefs to his audience, and by inscribing his own autobiographical traits and experiences upon these characters, he was (to those who knew him sufficiently well to recognize it) linking a self-portrait to those verbal signs. He wanted his audience to see him in the text as they read it.

\textbf{More’s Use of the Gaze after the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort}}

When More closes the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort}, he provides a way to connect the images in the treatise with images he was to cultivate in his other prison works. The very last extended image in the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} depicts Christ’s passion. More draws out the scene in detail, for the sake of “a right imagination and remembrance” of the event:

[Consider] the many sore bloody strokes that the cruel tormentors with rods and whips gave Him upon every part of His holy tender body; the scornful crown of sharp thorns beaten down upon His holy head so strait and so deep, that on every part His blessed blood issued out and streamed down; His lovely limbs drawn and


\textsuperscript{75} Prescott 427, Cousins 458, Schuster in Strauss 70, Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance} 11, Fox 238, and Norland 55.
stretched out upon the cross, to the intolerable pain of his forebeaten and sore beaten veins and sinews—new feeling with the cruel stretching and straining, [and with] pain far passing any cramp in every part of His blessed body at once. Then [consider] the great long nails cruelly driven with hammers through His holy hands and feet; and in this horrible pain lift[ed] up and let hang with the peise [weight] of all His body bearing down upon the painful wounded places so grevously pierced with nails; and in such torment [. . .] suffered to be pinned and pained the space of more than three long hours, till Himself willingly gave up unto His Father His holy soul. After which, yet to shew the mightiness of their malice after His holy soul departed, they pierced His holy heart with a sharp spear, at which issued out the holy blood and water whereof His holy sacraments have inestimable secret strength. (233-34)

Directly following this description, More sets forth a call to an extreme imitatio Christi:

If we would, I say, remember these things in such wise as would God we would, I verily suppose that the consideration of His incomparable kindness could not fail in such wise to inflame our key-cold hearts and set them on fire in His love. Then we should find ourself not only content but also glad and desirous to suffer death for His sake [. . .]. (234)

The closing admonition of the treatise, therefore, is that in order to strengthen himself to meet the extreme pains of martyrdom, More must develop an identity that parallels the most holy of martyrs, Christ himself. Choosing Christ as a model elevates More’s death from one endured merely for the sake of justice in general, to one endured for the
fountain of Justice itself, God.

Convinced of this truth, More cultivates images of himself as a type of Christ not only in the *Dialogue of Comfort* but also in the prison texts he wrote afterwards, as he waited for his execution. For example, in one of More’s letters to his daughter Margaret Roper, More describes the scene of his first indictment for not swearing the Oath of Succession. After refusing to explain exactly why his conscience would not let him take the oath (throughout his examinations, More kept his silence on this issue), More is led away from the council to an abandoned building overlooking a garden. There, alone, he watches “Master Doctor Latimer come into the garden, and there walked he with divers other doctors and chaplains of my Lord of Canterbury, and very merry I saw him, for he laughed, and took one or twain about the neck so handsomely, that if they had been women, I would have went [thought] he had been waxen wanton” (More, *Last* 58). He sees “Master Vicar of Croydon, and all the remnant of the priests off London that were sent for, were sworn, and that they had such favor at the Council’s hand that they [. . .] were sped apace to their great comfort, so far forth that Master Vicar of Croydon, either for gladness or for dryness, or else that it might be seen [. . .] went to my Lord’s buttery bar, and called for drink, and drank” (58-59). There are graphic echoes here of Christ’s last supper and courtyard trial: Judas Iscariot signified his treachery by eating and drinking from a vessel, Peter’s betrayal (figured by More as the leaders of the English church) occurred under Jesus’s distanced glance, and throughout most of his own trial

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76 It is interesting to note that More’s next sentence begins, “When they had played their pageant and gone out from the palace [. . .]” (59). He is ever conscious of the visual resonance the actions of the men around him have.
Jesus was silent. In another work, his *Treatise upon the Passion*, More figures his political enemies as “the council of Caiaphas and the Jews,” with Cromwell playing Judas. And in *De Tristitia Christi*, More has Jesus often directly address the reader over how one should accept tribulation unto death. The entire narrative is set in the Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Christ suffers before the actual execution; it is where Christ grapples with his own fear and aversion to the cross. The analogy between Gethsemane and More’s Tower is clear.

Once his writing ceased (apparently his writing instruments were confiscated), More provided vivid images of himself as a Church martyr via his live re-enactment of the Christological model of dying. The Solicitor General Richard Rich gave testimony against More, claiming that More had intimated to him that the king could not declare himself above the Pope as the ultimate spiritual leader in England. More denied this, saying, “[I]f this oath of yours, Master Rich, be true, then pray I that I never see God in the face; which I would not say, were it otherwise, to win the whole world.” It was only on Rich’s word that the evidence he proffered stood against More, for the two witnesses he called to back his claim admitted that they had not heard this alleged confession of More’s, and as More subsequently made clear, Rich’s character was not such that he

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77 Fox 218-19.
78 See Schuster’s “The Tower of London: More’s Gethsemane.” House notes, “Significantly, More departs from traditional *vitae Christi* in concentrating his meditation on a single episode, and even more particularly in selecting Gethsemane rather than Golgotha—that is, on the struggle which facilitated the sacrifice itself. In the agony of accepting his own death, Christ becomes the type for More himself when confronting his own unwillingness to undergo the ultimate *imitatio Christi*” (49).
79 About More’s commitment to the Passion, see Fox 242, House 49, and Haupt xii.
80 Chambers 338.
could be trusted. Shades are here of the false witnesses perjuring themselves in their testimonies against Christ. To prepare himself for death while in his cell, at least once More wrapped himself in a linen sheet. When it was time for More to walk to the scaffold on July 6, he came from the Tower “clad in a coarse garment of frieze, his long beard in disarray, haggard from imprisonment, and carrying a red cross in his hand. Four people in the watching crowd accosted him. The first [...] offered him a cup of wine. He gently pushed the cup aside, saying: ‘My master had easell and gall, not wine, given him to drink.’” Christ had a beard as he walked the Via Dolorosa, and More’s comment about the wine indicates strongly that he was imitating Christ, at least in the refusal of the drink. More had but recently grown the beard; perhaps he wanted the beard to strengthen his own likeness to the likeness of Christ in the public’s imaginary.

This action of More’s, this ultimate imitatio Christi, is an attempt to enter into a pattern outlined in ecclesiastical history and engrained in the consciousness of the Christian populace. This is the pattern of the martyr. In his trial, which took place before he penned the Dialogue of Comfort, More explicitly identified with the first Christian martyr:

More have I not to say, my Lords, but that like as the blessed apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present, and consented to the death of St. Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy saints in Heaven, and shall continue there friends for ever, so I verily

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81 Chambers 338.
82 Chambers 343.
83 Miles, Introduction xxx-xxxi.
trust, and shall therefore right heartily pray, that though your Lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in Heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation.  

After the *Dialogue of Comfort*, in his last letter to his daughter Margaret, More again attempted to fit himself into a pattern of martyrs. More wrote, “I cumber you, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry, if it [his execution] should be any longer than tomorrow, for it is Saint Thomas’ Even and the Utas of Saint Peter and therefore tomorrow long I to go to God, it were a day very meet and convenient for me” (More, *Last* 128). He speaks of Thomas à Becket, whose relics were celebrated on July 7, and of Peter the Apostle, who was allegedly martyred in Rome.

How did these images help More counter death? Without a doubt, they helped him enter the imaginary of his culture as a fruitful symbol of martyrdom innocent of Henry’s charges. One historian asserts, “As the biographies of Roper and Harpsfield testify, the myth-making possibilities in More’s life and death were far more important to his followers than the particular intricacies of his thought.” This claim is substantiated by the observations of De Silva:

The life of Thomas More [ . . . ], with its dramatic culmination in martyrial death, proved consistently intriguing, as evidenced by six or seven “biographies” written in the decades that followed. In less than seventy years there appeared “lives of More” by William Roper, Nicholas Harpsfield, Thomas Stapleton, an anonymous

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84 Qtd. in Chambers 342.
85 Hulse says, “More thought of himself as being like Becket, *made that similarity part of his public image*, and even managed to die on the eve of the feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury” (207, italics mine).
86 Fox 254.
author known as “Ro. Ba.,” Cresacre More, and two more that have been lost.

This is even more remarkable when one considers that the only other Tudor figure with an immediate biography is Cardinal Wolsey.\textsuperscript{87}

This perpetual continuance as a presence in a culture’s imaginary has a power of its own, especially if the culture is, as Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out, one that is willing to grant the image or symbol a life-like presence.\textsuperscript{88}

And without a doubt, the total collage of these images—within the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} and after it—shows that More could beat Henry at Henry’s own game of symbolic manipulation. More knew these tricks of the trade. He himself had taken part in the public spectacle of flogging heretics, playing the role of the flogger, in order that those who watched the incident would take heed not to fall into the trap of disbelief.\textsuperscript{89}

And at least once in the \textit{Dialogue of Comfort} More showed that he was aware of the spectatorial nature of the condemned man’s walk from the prison to the gallows (214-15). It was designed to showcase the prisoner, to make him or her a highly visible symbol attesting to the power of the laws of the realm. Yet More is able to reinterpret these very symbols of execution and to suggest their reinterpretation to others. An intriguing anecdote illustrates this ability of More’s. During one of Margaret Roper’s last visits to More, both he and she looked from More’s window in the Tower upon four condemned Carthusian monks as they were being drawn from the Tower to Tyburn, their place of

\textsuperscript{87} De Silva 2. See also Anderegg’s “The Tradition of Early More Biography.”
\textsuperscript{88} Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance} 86. In his article “Dead Man’s Treasure: The Cult of Thomas More,” Clark Hulse gives a very informative outline of how “[t]he cult of Thomas More developed [. . .] in the interior and exile spaces of Tudor culture” (208), especially by means of More’s portraits, which became more and more hagiographic as time distanced them from the historic event of More’s decapitation.
\textsuperscript{89} Strauss 55.
execution. Margaret’s visit took place during a time when More was supposedly restrained from visitors. At least two historians think it was allowed in order that father and daughter could be witnesses to this grim scene. Instead of allowing himself to see what Henry perhaps wanted More to see—he himself in the position of an outlaw doomed to physical erasure—More saw what he wanted to see, and he trained Margaret to see it, too. According to the account, More turned to Margaret and said, “Lo! dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheerfully going to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage?”

All throughout More’s imprisonment, Henry offered pardon to More in return for More’s oath. More refused to give this oath, and he refused to reveal even the reasons why he could not take the oath. This silence can be seen as More’s desperate attempt to protect himself: when it was suggested to him that his silence could be taken as a sign of treason, More replied “that treason lay in word or deed, not silence: ‘For this my silence neither your law nor any law in the world is able justly and rightly to punish me.’” But it could also be seen as More’s reserving unto himself, for his own use, a charge of semiotic ammunition. Henry wanted More’s oath to use it to enhance the sheen of validation of his Act of Supremacy; More wanted to reserve his words about the oath in order to keep this from happening and to wield them against Henry at a more opportune time. Both were struggling to obtain or to keep the symbols latent in More’s voice and body. The time for More to use his words came after More was found guilty in the trial of

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90 See Chambers 324-25 and Miles, “With a Coal?” 441-42.
91 Chambers 325.
92 Chambers 336. Chambers is drawing from Harpsfield’s Life, p. 186.
July 1. Just before his sentencing, More verbally published his view on the oath:

Seeing that I see ye are determined to condemn me (God knoweth how) I will now in discharge of my conscience speak my mind plainly and freely touching my indictment and your Statute withal.

And forasmuch as this indictment is grounded upon an Act of Parliament directly repugnant to the laws of God and his holy Church, the supreme government of which, or of any part whereof, may no temporal prince presume by any law to take upon him, as rightfully belonging to the See of Rome, a spiritual pre-eminence by the mouth of our Saviour himself, personally present upon earth, only to St. Peter and his successors, bishops of the same see, by special prerogative granted; it is therefore in law, amongst Christian men insufficient to charge any Christian man.93

When it was mentioned that the bishops and universities had sided with the king in this matter, More replied,

For I nothing doubt but that, though not in this realm, yet in Christendom about, of these well learned bishops and virtuous men that are yet alive, they be not the fewer part that are of my mind therein. But if I should speak of those that are already dead, of whom many be now holy saints in heaven, I am very sure it is the far greater part of them that, all the while they lived, thought in this case that way that I think now; and therefore am I not bounded, my Lord, to conform my conscience to the Council of one realm against the general Council of

93 Qtd. in Chambers 340.
Christendom. For of the foresaid holy bishops I have, for every bishop of yours, above one hundred; and for one Council or Parliament of yours (God knoweth what manner of one), I have all the Councils made these thousand years. And for this one kingdom, I have all other Christian realms."94

When More unleashed these words, he aligned himself with a hermeneutical frame that itself was in direct opposition to how Henry wanted the Oath to be interpreted. More’s frame rendered the very oath itself a detriment to Henry’s ultimate cause of unity in England. Thus, after the trial, Henry ordered the silencing of More. This silencing became obvious when More, preparing to go to the scaffold, was told, “The King’s pleasure is further that at your execution you shall not use many words.”95 More’s words had to be occluded from the public because, as one critic puts it, “unauthorized words endanger the stability of the structure and the illusion of containment that trials and executions strive to represent.”96 More still managed to introduce a destabilizing symbol, however. He sent his executioner “one angel of gold” after saying that he wished he could give him more, “as St. Cyprian did, who gave his executioner thirty pieces of gold.”97 The sinister parallel this kind gesture has to Christ’s betrayal is palpable.

94 Qtd. in Chambers 341.
95 Pope qtd. in Chambers 346.
96 Cunningham 211. The continuation of Cunningham’s observation is interesting and bears some weight on the present issue: “Counselors confine convicts’ words within the official dialogue so that the subsequent executions do not suddenly slip from carefully organized, self—interpreting spectacles into spontaneous, authentic appeals to common humanity with a reality and language of their own. If the doomed figures touch the hearts of others, if they establish themselves not as outcasts but as members of society, if they cause observers to identify with rather than against them, they imply alternative ways of viewing their deaths and destroy the sense of difference needed to justify their torture” (211).
97 Qtd. in Chambers 347.
More’s Mechanisms of Comfort

But did this fashioning and imaging by More really help him counter death? More’s image did live on, but More certainly did not. In what sense can one argue, then, that he successfully appropriated his own death to his ultimate advantage? The answer lies in examining some of More’s assumptions about Catholicism in light of his famous fear of pain. Given all the biographical evidence, one can grant that More really believed that life after death existed, that heaven and hell existed, that God rewarded the just and punished the unjust. More shows in the Dialogue of Comfort that he believed in the necessity of dying well. He believed that acting against one’s conscience was a serious transgression of God’s law and that committing that sin—especially when it came to the matter of misspeaking one’s beliefs about the supremacy of Christ—at the moment of death would damn a soul eternally. Furthermore, the biographical data reveal that More had a tremendous fear of pain. His fear of pain, then, would be to More a threat to his upcoming attempt to die well, constantly presenting to him the possibility that he would renege on his commitment to the supremacy of the pope (and thus of Christ) in England in order to escape the physical tortures involved in keeping the faith.

More put little stock in his reason’s ability to talk himself out of fearing pain. In

98 See More, Dialogue of Comfort 27, 62. See also Wunderli and Broce’s “The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England,” an article affording much insight on the matter of dying well. Pages 273-74 discuss the possibility that the Tudor state sought to control the moment of a condemn man’s execution (especially the words one could utter) in order to instill in the observers the idea that a good death included voicing one’s final state of obedience to the state.

99 See More, Dialogue of Comfort 185-86, 226; More, Last 53-54, 58, 73-74. See also Wunderli and Broce’s “The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England,” an article affording much insight on the matter of dying well. Pages 273-74 discuss the possibility that the Tudor state sought to control the moment of a condemn man’s execution (especially the words one could utter) in order to instill in the observers the idea that a good death included voicing one’s final state of obedience to the state.

100 See Norland 62; Miles, “The ‘Dialogue of Comfort’” 557; Miles, Introduction xxviii; Green 152.
theory, More could clearly see how the sort of death that was facing him met all the requirements (as delineated by the *Dialogue of Comfort*) of a truly excellent Christian death. But More could also see how the irrational body could usurp the will, overpowering it as the will sought to follow the rational mind. After a particularly stirring admonition in the *Dialogue of Comfort* by Anthony encouraging a good death by means of torture and execution, Vincent replies truthfully, “I suppose surely that any man that hath reason in his head shall hold himself satisfied with this [Anthony’s exhortation]. But of truth, uncle, all the pinch is in the pain. [. . .] [A]ll the wisdom in this world can never so master pain but that pain will be painful, spite of all the wit in this world” (215).

Vincent then provides a scene wherein the image of the overthrow of reason by pain is etched into his audience’s minds. This scene is the famed story of the two harts and the bitch:

I remember the fable that Aesop telleth of a great old hart that had fled from a little bitch, which had made suit after him and chased him so long that she had lost him. And, as he hoped, more than half given him over. By occasion whereof having then some time to talk, and meeting with another of his fellows, he fell in deliberation with him what were best for him to do; whether to run on still and fly farther from her, or turn again and fight with her.

Whereunto the other hart advised him to fly no farther, lest the bitch might happen to find him again at such time as he should with the labor of farther

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101 More was very careful to draw the lines clearly when he approached the issue of a genuine martyrdom vs. a pseudo martyrdom, a martyrdom brought about by one’s rash and suicidal embracing of death rather than by one’s total commitment to a pure life. See More, *Dialogue of Comfort* 100, 110, 116; More, *Last* 121; Green 148-52.
fleeing be fallen out of breath, and thereby all out of strength too. [Then] should he be killed lying, where he could not stir him; whereas if he would turn and fight he were in no peril at all. [. . .] “She is but a little body scant half so much as thou. And thy horns may thrust her through before she can touch thy flesh [. . .].” “By my troth,” quoth the other hart, “I like your counsel well, and methinketh that the thing is even soothly such as you say. But I fear me when I hear once that urchin bitch bark I shall fall to my feet and forget all together. But yet an you will go back with me, then methink we shall be strong enough against that one bitch between us both.” Wherunto the other hart agreed, and so they both appointed them thereupon. But even as they were about to busk them forward to it, the bitch had found the foot again, and on she cam yearning [barking] toward the place. Whom as soon as the harts heard, they to go both twain apace!” (218-19)

This dynamic of self-betrayal More applied directly to himself in a letter to Margaret Roper. After listing three concrete reasons why he should not fear a premature death by execution, More wrote, “And therefore my reason sheweth me, Margaret, that it were great folly for me to be sorry to come to that death, which I would after wish that I had died [were I to evade it by taking the Oath of Succession]. [. . .] I assure you (thanks be to God) the thinking of any such [death,] albeit it hath grieved me ere this, yet at this day grieveth me nothing” (More, Last 102). But More continued: “And yet I know well for all this mine own frailty, and that Saint Peter which feared it much less than I, fell in such fear soon after that at the word of a simple girl he forsook and forsware our Savior. And therefore am I not, Meg, so mad, as to warrant myself to stand” (102).
Regardless of whether he did it consciously or unconsciously as a result of an acculturated habit of thought, More, it is permissible to think, set himself up in his *Dialogue of Comfort* as a figure to be watched in order that the pressure of expectation generated by the watching audience might give him psychological strength against this threat of a betrayal of Christ. Toward the end of the treatise, More has Anthony paint a vivid scene for Vincent, who is still fearing death:

Now, [suppose] it were so, cousin, that ye should be brought through the broad high street of a great long city. And that all along the way that ye were going, there were on the one side of the way a rabble of ragged beggars and madmen that would despite and dispraise you with all the shameful names that they could call you, and all the villainous words that they could say to you. And [suppose] that there were then all along the other side of the same street where you should come by, a goodly company standing in a fair range, a row of wise and worshipful fold allowing and commending you—more than fifteen times as many as that rabble of ragged beggars and railing madmen are. Would you let your way by your will, weening that ye went unto your shame for the shameful jesting and railing of those mad foolish wretches? Or hold on your way with a good cheer and a glad heart, thinking yourself much honored by the laud and approbation of that other honorable sort? (214-15)

Echoes of More’s final speech after his being found guilty at the July 1 trial reverberate strongly here, especially when More appeals to the whole corps of Christendom—from the earliest martyrs to those of More’s own day—as witnesses to the justification of his
stand against the Oath of Succession.

In writing Anthony’s piece before he (More) stood his trial, and then in finally offering words in his trial that bear such strong resemblances to Anthony’s, More invited those in his audience who had read the *Dialogue of Comfort* to identify him with Anthony. In doing so, More asked them to levy upon him a sort of pressure to stay in character, to maintain the role he has created for himself in Anthony. Anthony makes numerous claims about God’s grace unto the faithful in their hour of need. When the body is “shrinking at the meditation of pain and death,” one can call on God for help, and God “shall (if you so desire Him) not fail to work with you therein, and get and give you the grace, [so] that you shall submit and conform your will therein unto His” (184).

Reason is not enough: a person could understand all the requirements of a good death and still fail to die well. A miraculous faith was needed to valorize the reasoning. Very early in the treatise Anthony says, “Sith all our principal comfort must come of God, we must first presuppose [. . .] one ground to begin withal, whereupon all that we shall build must be supported and stand. That is to wit, the ground and foundation of faith, without which had ready before, all the spiritual comfort that any man may speak of can never avail a fly” (15). Tying into a bundle all these requisite gifts enabling one to make a good death, Anthony makes Christ’s role as martyr the prototype for all Christians who are called upon to suffer unto death. In light of this, the miraculous inner comfort comes by “the secret inward inspiration of His Holy Spirit” to strengthen the martyr completely: “Th[en] 102 The prevalence of drama terminology has been well noted in More’s writings. In the *Dialogue of Comfort*, the idea of one’s playing a role (ether well or poorly) is almost ubiquitous in Anthony’s advice. Some sections among many that involve role playing in some form or another, see *Dialogue of Comfort* 55, 144, 178, 183, 186, and 233.

103 See also *Dialogue of Comfort* 228, 237.
you shall as His true disciple follow Him, and with goodwill without grudge do as He did, and take your cross of pain and passion upon your back. And die for the truth with Him” (185).

More committed himself to enacting this good death as he ultimately played the role of Christ, conforming to Anthony’s admonitions, admonitions the audience who had read the *Dialogue of Comfort* would see as coming not from some fictional character named Anthony but from More himself. More the writer forms a superlative image of himself in the text, an image of someone cognizant of the requirements for being a apt receptacle of miraculous grace and faith. He did so in order that More the man might have an ideal to shoot for. In attempting the heights of the ideal, he pushed himself to become a better person (or, rather, a better martyr). The pressure behind this push was the gaze of an audience trained to recognize the ideal image and to anticipate More to instantiate that image with his own material body.

In his upcoming execution, More could indeed provide a plenary manifestation of this ideal image if, as he pointed out in the *Dialogue of Comfort*, he could receive special grace and faith from God. In his letters from the Tower, More emphasizes his trust in God for this special grace. To Margaret, More reiterates the possibilities that lay before him and stresses his dependence upon God:

> God hath given me to the straight, that either I must deadly displease him, or abide any worldly harm that he shall for mine other sins, under name of this thing, suffer to fall upon me. Whereof (as I before this have told you too) I have ere I came here, not left unbethought nor unconsidered, the very worst and the
uttermost that can by possibility fall. And albeit that I know mine own frailty full well and the natural faintness of mine own heart, yet if I had not trusted that God should give me strength rather to endure all things, then offend him by swearing ungodly against mine own conscience, you may be very sure I would not have come here. (More, Last 74)

Later in the same letter, More writes that God’s grace “shall give me the strength to take it [his death] patiently, and peradventure somewhat gladly too” (88).

The promise More is making to the audience is that he will die this way. If he should fail, all his efforts to maintain integrity of conscience would be for naught. More understood that this good death was not a sure thing. In another letter to Margaret, he confesses, “I know well for all this mine own frailty, and that Saint Peter which feared it much less than I, fell in such fear soon after that at the word of a simple girl he forsook and forswore our Savior. And therefore am I not, Meg, so mad, as to warrant myself to stand” (More, Last 102). In bolstering himself to take a stand, More presents himself as an object under the public gaze, displaying token signs of the alleged presence of this inner grace. This grace will cause one undergoing a torturous death to maintain “a good cheer and a glad heart” (More, Dialogue of Comfort 215). Biographers have told us that this merriness is exactly what More maintained from the moment he stepped out of the Tower to the moment the axe fell. Perhaps More displayed it in order to be read a certain way, the way delineated by the Dialogue of Comfort.

In the very last extended picture drawn by Anthony in the Dialogue of Comfort, More presented his audience with the following scene. Men are being tortured by the Turks for
their faith in Christ. We, the audience, are to imagine that there might then appear the great glory of God, the Trinity in His high marvellous majesty, our Savior in His glorious manhood sitting on His throne with His immaculate Mother and all that glorious company calling us there unto them. And that yet our way should lie through marvellous painful death before we could come to them. Upon the sight (I say) of that glory, there would, I ween, be no man that once would shrink thereat. But every man would run on toward them in all that ever he might [. . .]. (236)

The act of seeing heaven, of holding heaven as an object of sight, strengthens these martyrs. But insinuated into the syntax of the story is the implicit notion that being seen by heaven also provides strength for the martyrs. The heavenly host has an active agency, “calling” the martyrs, recognizing them, and positioning them as holy beings in the imaginary of heaven. In understanding how the angelic audience sees them, the new martyrs rush to seize their true places in that lore.

**Conclusion**

In Holbein’s 1529 painting “The Family of Thomas More,” More is depicted sitting at the center of the portrait, his father seated next to him, and his entire extended family clustered around this nucleus. More’s secretary, John Harris, and More’s fool, Henry Patterson, also make it into the picture. Every figure in the portrait except one has his or her body and face turned either to the left or to the right, thus evading any direct visual contact with the viewing audience. The figure who stands arms akimbo squarely facing
the viewer, eyes demanding a full-on stare, is the household fool, Patterson. It is as if
Patterson defies the conventions under which the other subjects of the painting are
subjected. Of course, his is a pose also—a pose approved of by More, who presumably
had the final say on the composition of the commissioned piece. Patterson, in a pose that
self-effaces itself as artificial while pretending to be boldly natural, eventually captures
the viewer’s gaze, wresting it away from the center of the painting, its compositional
focus. One excuses Patterson’s deviance from the normative pose when one remembers
that he was the household fool. He is not expected to conform to any models other than
the crosscultural self-stylings that fools employed. As a fool, Patterson is excused by us
for looking directly at us, and perhaps eventually dismissed, but his gaze does capture us,
reversing the painter’s control over how the picture is viewed.

In the same way, More, who often styled himself as a fool,\(^{104}\) wrested the semiotic
arena of the scaffold away from the Tudor state. During More’s lifetime, the scaffold
existed not only to mete out the consequences of justice, but also to highlight the Tudors’
power over their realm. The condemned were to fit into the scheme as symbols
reinforcing this power. By refusing to take on the right pose, however, More presents
himself as a curiosity, something to draw the eyes of the audience and to cause them to
gaze longer than they should. In thinking of More as a man long past the point of caring
for convention, the audience might be tempted to excuse More for this failure to pose
aright. The audience might indeed return eventually to the whole portrait of the execution
and read it as Henry would want it read. But they will remember More for making them

\(^{104}\) See More, *Last 77*; Cousins 465-67; and Yee *passim*. 
stare at him longer than they should have.

But, in fact, by posing askance, More is purposefully asking to be seen. I believe he posed this way because he wanted the public gaze to linger on his condition. Appropriating the public gaze gave him certain tools to use in countering his death that would not have been available otherwise. With the public gaze upon him, More could work the public’s imaginary, using its ability to refigure representations and reinterpret signs. He could fashion a self-image replete with tokens that cause an audience to develop expectations about how he would face his death. He could assume the responsibilities of a performer, which included the pressure to stay in role, the very thing that kept More from balking at the crucial moment.
Unlike Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* and More’s *Dialogue of Comfort*, Shakespeare’s play *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* does not employ the gaze to counter death, whether as introspection or as public spectacle. Instead, the countering occurs by means of a dilution of the individual into a larger body of selves. The play suggests that an understanding of the family unit as a figurative body can allow individual family members to view their own bodies as belonging to an organic whole. This figurative body reciprocates benefits upon individual selves in proportion to the energies expended by those individuals to maintain and extend the family. When a family member turns inward, closing off communication and hoarding generative resources (such as, for example, an unmarried daughter), he or she can expect a death that will prove to be the end of both the individual and the family. However, when a family member is willing to give away such resources to someone outside the family, one finds that forms of the self are carried outward, past the eventual and inevitable physical demise of one’s physical body. This dynamic is particularly applicable to the father, who must decide whether or not to give a daughter away in marriage to a male outside the family. If he does, and if he chooses that male according to his ability to mirror himself as the father, then he (the
father) can vicariously and legitimately “impregnate” his daughter, that is, he in effect creates forms of himself via the grandchildren the new marriage produces. Because these new forms survive the death of the father, his death is not an obliteration of his person.

Death at Antioch

The opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, his romance play of 1608,\(^{105}\) has Pericles in Antioch to win the hand of the daughter of king Antiochus. To do so, Pericles must answer Antiochus’ riddle or lose his head:

> I am no viper, yet I feed
> On mother’s flesh which did me breed.
> I sought a husband, in which labour
> I found that kindness in a father.
> He’s father, son, and husband mild;
> I, mother, wife, and yet his child.

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\(^{105}\) The authorship of *Pericles* has been heavily disputed. A large cadre of critics believes that the first part of the play—up to Scene 3 in most modern editions—was written by George Wilkins (c. 1575-1618) and that Shakespeare took over from Scene 3 to the end. F. D. Hoeniger summarizes the reasons for these views but, surprisingly, advocates not Wilkins but John Day as Shakespeare’s collaborator (lii-lxiii). Hoeniger having written in 1963, Roger Warren provides a more current overview of the authorship in general and the issues of textual reconstruction (60-80), and F. Elizabeth Hart a more current list of criticism supporting dual authorship (318, note 15). Few critics have taken the side that the play is all Shakespeare’s, although Doreen Delvecchio and Anthony Hammond’s recent case for Shakespeare alone is doing much to change this imbalance in the sides of the debate (see Delvecchio and Hammond 197-210). My work here will not be concerned so much with the extent of Shakespeare’s direct hand in the matter as with the overall unity of dramatic action of the characters themselves. John Dean’s observation that “*Pericles* does form one sensible, coherent dramatic unity of Shakespearean quality” (169) seems right to me, as does G. Wilson Knight’s approach that although “some much earlier play, either of Shakespearean or other authorship” makes its presence felt in the first half of *Pericles*, “we need not, from an interpretative view, be seriously disquieted,” for “[w]hatever we think of certain parts, the whole, as we have it, is unquestionably dominated by a single mind; that mind is very clearly Shakespeare’s” (112). In the interest more of removing points not involved in this present argument than of positioning myself in this debate, I will refer to the play as Shakespeare’s.
How they may be, and yet in two,

As you will live resolve it you. (1.1.65-72)

Pericles solves the riddle almost immediately: Antiochus is having sex with his daughter. Only under this assumption does the riddle make sense: Antiochus and his daughter (nameless throughout the play) are two separate people, but because of their incestuous relationship they comprise six different familial roles—mother, wife, daughter, father, husband, son (in law).

Instead of answering the riddle directly, Pericles responds obliquely, supplying Antiochus just enough information to let him know that he (Pericles) now knows of the incest but does not want to reveal it and thus accuse the king openly. Pericles says,

Great king,

Few love to hear the sins they love to act;

’Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it.

Who has a book of all that monarchs do,

He’s more secure to keep it shut, than shown;

[. . . . . . . . .]

Kings are earth’s gods: in vice their law’s their will;

And if Jove stray, who dares say Jove doth ill?

It is enough you know, [. . .]

[. . . . . . . . .]

All love the womb that their first being bred,

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Pericles will be from Delvecchio and Hammond’s New Cambridge Shakespeare edition.
Then give my tongue like leave, to love my head. (1.1.92-94, 104-06, 108-09)

As the last couplet makes clear, Pericles asks to be excused from the corporal punishment due him for not publicly explaining the riddle. Antiochus duplicitously grants Pericles forty more days in Antioch in order to come up with a more flattering answer, but that same night Pericles flees Antioch for Tyre, correctly guessing that Antiochus plans to kill him.

Some critics have argued that the incest Pericles uncovers at Antioch somehow infects his perspective and actions throughout the rest of the play. A clear example of this view is Lynda E. Boose’s argument that after the riddle scene “the rest of the play can rightly be called a flight from incest” (339). Boose sees the cause of Pericles’ ensuing travails as “rooted in the matter of Antioch [i.e., incest] that begins and ends the play and that Pericles’ actions unconsciously mirror”; the resolution of the trouble comes only when Pericles as father “has freed his daughter from the structure to which the image of his own desire has symbolically consigned her” (339). This conclusion complements the psychoanalytical argument of such critics as Coppélia Kahn, Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast, and Jeanie Grant Moore, who have each interpreted the play along more or less established Oedipal lines.

To be sure, the incest encountered by Pericles at Antioch is too heinous a crime to be introduced into the narrative as an accident or coincidence. By its very nature, incest involves sexual urges that are normally seen as morally reprehensible and

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107 Besides the following, see also Adelman 185-87; Shell 66; Taylor 72; Thorne, “Cycle” 89; Thorne, “Pericles” 47-48; and Wheeler 312.
108 Kahn 230-31, Prendergast 54-55, and Moore 34-35. See also Williams 159-65, Oesterlen 39, and Barber 61.
psychologically inhibiting. The occasion of incest that opens *Pericles* immediately flags itself as an important part of the play. Nevertheless, one wonders whether the critics preoccupied with incest in the play’s opening have missed something more devastating standing behind the incestuous act.

Pericles’ activity does not portray a man brooding over his own personal transgressions into incest. Rather, his ensuing actions show a man who is trying to escape a basic form of death, of which the incest in the opening scene is but a sign or symptom, for before Pericles recognizes incest in Antiochus’ court, he recognizes death. The severed heads of the former suitors who did not solve the riddle are arranged so that Pericles can see them (1.1.35). Moreover, the first actual words that Antiochus speaks to Pericles warn him that he, too, may die in his attempt (1.1.2). When the daughter enters the court, Antiochus again warns Pericles that if the daughter is like a “fair Hesperides,” then “death like dragons here affright thee hard” (1.1.28, 30), and he points out the severed heads “with dead cheeks [that] advise thee to desist / For going on death’s net, whom none resist” (1.1.41-42). Immediately, Pericles responds with a telling speech that outlines a philosophy of death:

Antiochus, I thank thee, who hath taught
My frail mortality to know itself,
And by those fearful objects to prepare
This body, like to them, to what I must:
For Death remembered should be like a mirror
Who tells us life’s but breath, to trust it, error.
I’ll make my will then, and as sick men do
Who know the world, see heaven, but feeling woe
Grip not at earthly joys as erst they did;
So I bequeath a happy peace to you
And all good men as every prince should do.
My riches to the earth from whence they came,

[To the Daughter] But my unspotted fire of love to you.
Thus ready for the way of life or death
I wait the sharpest blow. (1.1.42-56)

At this point in the play, Pericles does not link incest with death. As this speech shows, he is not much troubled by the prospect of dying, thinking it “no hazard in the enterprise” in winning the daughter (1.1.5). He even makes his will, so to speak. But when he discovers the fact of incest, suddenly he is less cavalier towards death, deciding to flee from it on the seas rather than face it in Antioch. Incest, then, somehow injects the notion of death with a hazard it did not have before.

This more potent version of an incest-laced death is the real threat to Pericles throughout the play. I will argue that with their incest, Antiochus and his daughter have shown Pericles a family whose collapse upon itself is inevitable because of its inherent sterility. The widower Antiochus has usurped the place of a legitimate husband for his daughter, his only child, so he has made it impossible for himself to have a grandchild. Because he cannot have a grandchild, he cannot expect to be part of a family that renews itself through children who carry the memories and the likenesses of their ancestors into
the future, and in this way “rescue” the ancestors from death. Furthermore, his willingness to engage in physical intercourse with his daughter is a sign of his penchant for the material form of his daughter (her body) instead of a spiritual or intellectual form. He does not think of his immediate family as a conceptual unit. Rather, his family is just so much physical material to be used for his own ends. Pericles’ escape from this pernicious perspective is to recognize the conceptual nature of a family, especially the fact that on a notional level, family members can share their identities with each other, acting with such harmony and sympathy that a sense of a combined self begins to underlie the family unit. When Pericles eventually comes to understand this notional nature of the family unit, he is able to marry, have a child, and engage in figurative procreation with his daughter by directing her into a legitimate marriage with a surrogate of himself. The offspring of this marriage will carry Pericles’ image away from his dying body and into a self-renewing, forward-extending collective of bodies—his family.

**The Father/Daughter Models in *Pericles***

Two father/daughter pairs confront Pericles during the first half of the play, giving him examples of how fathers should, and should not, interact with their daughters in their quests to counter death. To position these examples against each other in the most effective way possible, a review of Pericles’ travels is in order. After Pericles leaves Antioch under the cover of darkness, he returns to Tyre, where he consults with his trusted advisor Hellicanus. Hellicanus encourages Pericles to travel from Tyre in order to keep Antiochus from attacking the city. Pericles leaves with a small entourage to sail to
Tarsus. Pericles, in fact, brings grain to Tarsus. Tarsus is suffering a severe famine during this time, and when Pericles arrives with enough provisions to save the city, the citizens hail Pericles as their savior. Pericles stays there until he receives a message from Hellicanus saying Antiochus has found out that Pericles is at Tarsus. He and his crew set out to sea once again, only to be shipwrecked off the shore of Pentapolis, another Greek city. Pericles alone survives, and some fishermen who find him on shore guide him to the court of Simonides, the king of Pentapolis, who is holding a tournament for the hand of his daughter Thaisa. Pericles wins the tournament, marries Thaisa (who become pregnant directly after the marriage), and stays at Pentapolis.

When Pericles learns that Antiochus has died (he and his daughter are burned up in fire from heaven as they parade through Antioch on a chariot) Pericles and Thaisa begin their return to Tyre. En route, the ship encounters a storm. Frightened by the gale, Thaisa prematurely delivers Marina with great difficulty. Pericles thinks Thaisa has died in the process, so he seals her body in a richly laden coffin and commits it to the sea. Later, the coffin washes up in Ephesus, where Thaisa is revived by Cerimon, a noble citizen schooled in the natural arts. She joins the temple virgins, thinking to live out her days forever separated from Pericles. Meanwhile, Pericles makes a detour to Tarsus to entrust his daughter’s upbringing to Cleon and Dioniza, the king and queen of the city, and then sails to Tyre, promising to return for Marina when she is of age. Eventually, out of jealousy for her own daughter Philoten, Dioniza schemes to have Marina murdered by an assassin at the sea shore. As the assassin is about to strike the blow, pirates snatch Marina and take her to Miteline, where they sell her to a brothel. There Marina mounts a
successful campaign to keep her virginity and in the process gains the confidence of the 
governor of the city, Lysimachus.

So now the plot is centered on Pericles’ recovery of his own missing daughter. When 
Pericles returns to Tarsus to collect Marina, he is told she is dead and shown the fake 
tomb. At this point, Pericles enters a sort of living death. He goes mute and unresponsive, 
and he and his unfortunate courtiers begin an aimless wandering at sea. When they finally 
sail into the harbor of Miteline, Lysimachus boards the ship to greet the strangers and 
initiates Pericles’ reunion with Marina. He learns of Pericles’ predicament and suggests 
that Marina be allowed to visit Pericles. As Marina talks to Pericles, Pericles revives. He 
receives a vision from Diana, who tells him to go to Ephesus to sacrifice at her temple. 
He and his crew, including Marina and Lysimachus, who at Pericles’ insistence is to 
marry Marina, set sail to Ephesus, and at the temple they find Thaisa. Pericles and Thaisa 
return to Pentapolis to rule in the place of the deceased Simonides, and Lysimachus and 
Marina return to Tyre to rule in Pericles’ stead.

As this summary makes clear, there are three father/daughter pairs in the play: 
Antiochus and his nameless daughter, Simonides and Thaisa, and Pericles and Marina.109 
All the members of these three pairings encounter some form of death. Antiochus and his 
daughter experience unnatural, physical deaths; Simonides experiences a natural, 
physical death, while Thaisa suffers an apparent death and a social death; and Pericles 
and Marina both undergo psychological deaths. The ubiquity of death in different forms, 
coupled with the three depictions of a daughter’s marriage, suggests that death is the

109 I do not include Cleon and Philoten because although Cleon does play a significant role in the play, 
Philoten does not. There is no father/daughter interaction between the two.
main problem of the play, and that a fertile daughter is the solution. Incest is a major cog in the solution. The title of the play—*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*—suggests that Pericles is ultimately the figure most connected with the workings out of the solution, and the one most threatened by the incest at Antioch. It is important, therefore, to examine the father/daughter relationships of the play in order to delineate the nature of Pericles’ counter against death.

**Antiochus vs. Simonides**

Antiochus and his daughter model the solution gone bad. When his daughter reaches a marriageable age, Antiochus beds her and sets things up so that all suitors who come to Antioch must die. If they do not solve the riddle, they die by default. However, if they solve it, then they can do one of three things: declare it openly, declare a false answer, or declare nothing at all. Under the conditions of the riddle, the last two options give Antiochus the right to kill the suitor since the suitor does not solve the riddle. The first option gives Antiochus an opportunity to frame the answer as an insult. His city is already so cowed by Antiochus, or so blind to the incest, that Antiochus would expect no opposition to a course of action that dealt with the insult as severely as he wished, even up to declaring war on the suitor and his city (a threat Pericles recognizes). Thus instead of setting up his daughter as a potential seed bed for the generation of new lives, Antiochus uses his daughter as a trap to put all potential husbands (i.e., surrogate fathers) to death.

Antiochus does not want to separate from his daughter. In fact, he wants to consume
her and to have her completely. This self-serving activity can again be seen in the riddle, which is composed from the daughter’s point of view. This perspective is particularly evident in the sixth line of the riddle: “I, mother, wife, and yet his child” (1.1.70). Yet Antiochus’ daughter did not write this riddle; Antiochus did. To do this type of writing, Antiochus had to envision himself as the daughter. His ability to do this is a sign, in fact, that he has already subsumed her identity. The parental appropriation of the daughter’s self is evident from the start of the riddle. The first four lines are:

I am no viper, yet I feed

On mother’s flesh which did me breed.

I sought a husband, in which labour

I found that kindness in a father. (1.1.65-68)

One can almost hear the daughter’s voice reciting these lines, although the script does not indicate that she is reading. The lines would make sense if Antiochus himself were reading the riddle. He feeds on the flesh (the daughter) of the wife who bred for him the child (“did me breed”). He allegedly seeks a husband for this daughter, but the “labour” of the husband (i.e., sexual intercourse) he himself has already provided.

That he could not resist possessing his daughter’s body shows how his primary perspective on his daughter is as material that exists for his own purpose and satisfaction. He has closed down her personality and taken away her voice. Once in the play the daughter says she would like to leave her father for someone else. When Pericles arrives to solve the riddle, she tells him, “Of all ’sayed yet, mayst thou prove prosperous / Of all ’sayed yet, I wish thee happiness” (1.1. 59-60). But these are the only lines she speaks.
She loses her voice, and so has no identity of her own. She has no identity, no name, and is labeled only as “Daughter” throughout the scenes in which she appears.

Her inability to maintain an identity betokens a deeper inability to separate from her father, a problem that eventually kills her, even though she may not be as worthy of death as Antiochus. Gower, who serves as a ghostly chorus in the play, blames the perverted situation on Antiochus—“the father [. . .] her to incest did provoke”—and describes the pair as “Bad child, worse father, to entice his own / To evil, should be done by none” (1.0. 25-26, 27-28). Nevertheless, when “A fire from heaven” strikes Antiochus, because the daughter is still at his side, she dies also (2.4.1-12).

In almost absolute contrast to Antiochus, Simonides, the king of Pentapolis, has a correct, healthy relationship with his daughter Thaisa. When she reaches a marriageable age, Simonides genuinely intends to unite her with a worthy companion. On her birthday knights from all over the Mediterranean are at Simonides’ court, where they are to tourney for her hand, and although Simonides can reserve the right to refuse the winner, all are understood to have a genuine chance to win the daughter.

Simonides’ union with his daughter is not a literal, physical union but is instead grounded in a notional realm. The intercourse they engage in is not sexual but logocentric. Words shuttle back and forth between the two in a way that is harmonious, mutually pleasurable, and beneficial. Their verbal play stands out most clearly when both Thaisa and Simonides stand before the suitors who are preparing to joust. Each knight must present his emblem and motto to Thaisa. Throughout the scene, Thaisa acts like the voice of a figurative body comprising her and Simonides, and he acts like the body’s
mind, hearing and making sense of what Thaisa is relaying. She receives the emblems of
the knights and reads their mottos aloud, and it is Simonides who actually interprets them
(2.2.1-47). After the knights have competed, they are feted in the great hall. Pericles has
won the day and is accorded the seat of honor. Throughout the feast Thaisa again acts as
the voice for Simonides. She and Simonides sit apart from the knights, and when
Simonides wants to find out more about Pericles, he sends Thaisa to ask him. She
interacts with Pericles and then brings the answers back to her father (2.3.52-84).

It is important to note that unlike Antiochus’ relationship with his daughter, a
relationship that privileged the physical above the notional, the logocentric nature of
Simonides and Thaisa’s interactions with each other is primary, and the physical
connections between father and daughter are secondary. When they watch Pericles eat his
meal, both separately experience curiosity, a cognitive sensation. This shared curiosity,
which reveals a bond between the two, mutes their physical desire (in this case, for actual
food):

Simonides:  [Aside] By Jove I wonder, that is king of thoughts,
These cates resist me, he [Pericles] not thought upon.

Thaisa:    [Aside] By Juno that is queen of marriage,
All viands that I eat do seem unsavoury,
Wishing him my meat.  (2.3.26-30)\(^{110}\)

\(^{110}\) This model of harmony may explain why so many times in Pericles one person’s eating or tasting of
another person is referred to, especially in a sexual, generative context among potential characters that have
the potential to become related through marriage. Pericles wants to “taste the fruit” of Antiochus’ daughter
(1.1.22); Per his own riddle, Antiochus was his wife’s flesh, which his daughter now perversely enjoys (“I
feed / On mother’s flesh which did me breed” [1.1.65-66]); Thaisa thinks on Pericles, “wishing him my
meat” (2.3.31); Simonides drinks to Pericles, “[w]ishing it so much blood” to Pericles’ life (2.3.73); and
The clearest indication that Simonides and Thaisa’s union is a good model is that Thaisa gets to keep her own name, voice, and identity throughout the play. Clearly she talks more than Antiochus’ daughter ever did, and yet she possesses more than mere volubility. Thaisa has her own voice because she has her own thoughts and desires, in spite of how close she is to her father. Her burgeoning independence is on display when she decides she wants to marry Pericles. She writes a letter to her father expressing the decision as a final one, regardless of whether Simonides approves or not. Simonides reads, “she tells me here / She’ll wed the stranger knight / Or never more to view nor day or light” (2.5.14-16). Her strong voice allows her to make the threat of separating her words and her body from her father—one supposes that if she will no longer leave her room to “view nor day or light,” she will have to leave Simonides’ side to do it. Thus, her voice, along with the identity it creates for her, gives her the strength to initiate a bodily separation from her father. In turn, this separation creates a space for a new, younger male to take Simonides’ place in his relationship with Thaisa.

Simonides recognizes this imminent separation and encourages it in a strange way. He makes it clear that he approves of Thaisa’s headstrong ways. When he reads Thaisa’s letter, he says,

'Tis well, mistress, your choice agrees with mine,

I like that well. Nay how absolute she’s in’t,

Not minding whether I dislike or no.

Pericles’ wishes to eat Marina’s words (to him, Marina is “[a]nother Juno, who starves the ears she feeds / And makes them hungry the more she gives them speech” [5.1.107-08]). I must note that these bodily functions are particularly important in maintaining the present life, and in propagating the future life, of the body.
Well, I do commend her choice and will no longer
Have it be delayed. (2.5.17-21)

Yet when he sees Pericles approaching, he says, “Soft, here he comes, / I must dissemble
it” (2.5.21-22). Simonides makes an outward show of disapproval, masking his full
inward consent to the match. When he confronts Thaisa about her decision in Pericles’
presence, he orchestrates the following speech:

Yea mistress, are you so peremptory?
[Aside] I am glad on’t with all my heart.
[Aloud] I’ll tame you, I’ll bring you in subjection.
Will you, not having my consent,
Bestow your love and your affections
Upon a stranger? —[Aside] who for aught I know,
May be, nor can I think the contrary,
As great in blood as I myself.
[Aloud] Therefore, hear you mistress, either frame
Your will to mine, and you sir, hear you,
Either be ruled by me, or I’ll make you—
Man and wife. (2.5.71-82)

Perhaps the function of the flummery is to ritualize the “break up” of the father/daughter
pairing in order officially to make room for the new male.

When Simonides sees an equal in Pericles (who is as “great in blood as I myself”), he
sees someone who can act as his legitimate surrogate in a procreative relationship with
Thaisa and thereby engender descendents for Simonides. It is no small point that Simonides facilitates this shift of attachment and affection in order to procure a grandchild: “It pleaseth me so well that I will see you wed, / And then with what haste you can, get you to bed” (2.5.90-91). The haste works, for Gower tells us next that “Hymen hath brought the bride to bed, / Where by the loss of maidenhead / A babe is moulded” (3.0.1-11).

Perhaps the daughter is so special to the father’s counter against death because it is possible for the father to view his daughter as, basically, a new womb that belongs to him, something he can never suppose in his son(s). To act upon a literal possession of the womb is to deviate into incest. To act upon a notional possession is to recognize that he (the father) has the right to give the womb away to someone similar to himself who can act as his sexual surrogate. A literal possession of one’s own daughter is a sort of masturbation, a useless spilling of the generative potential. A notional possession, because it allows the father to “give away” the daughter, facilitates a fertile, vicarious intercourse that can “rebirth” the father, especially if the father can fashion the transaction so that a male who mirrors the father receives the daughter. Of course, physical death will still come to the father as he ages, but its sting is mitigated by the fact that from the dying ancestor so much new life has sprung. His essential qualities—qualities that transcend the physical body—will be insinuated into regenerated forms, and although refigured, still remembered. As ripples extending away from their center always point back to their center by virtue of their own formation, so the father’s descendents—if he allows them to come into being—will point back to him.
The Pericles/Marina Pair, Part One: Marina

Pericles admits freely that he traveled to Antioch to find a noble wife capable of producing noble children: “I went to Antioch,” he tells Hellicanus, his trusted advisor in Tyre, “Whereas thou knowest against the face of death / I sought the purchase of a glorious beauty / From whence an issue I might propagate, / Are arms to princes and bring joys to subjects” (1.2.69-73). When he discovers the incest, Pericles quickly changes his opinion about Antiochus’ daughter, telling her that

now my thoughts revolt—

For he’s no man on whom perfections wait,

That knowing sin within would touch the gate—

You are a fair viol, and your sense the strings,

Who, fingered to make man his lawful music,

Would draw heaven down and all the gods to hearken;

But being played upon before your time,

Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime. (1.1.79-86).

Instead, it is at Pentapolis where Pericles finally finds his prize. Because she has not been “played upon” before her time, Thaisa can enter a sexual partnership with Pericles free from paternal competition. The text describes his partnership with Thaisa as somehow a means for sustaining life for Pericles, and he loves her for it. When she asks him whether he loves her, he answers, “Even as my life my blood that fosters it” (2.5.87).

The fact that Pericles can still function as a normal person through the loss of Thaisa
at sea during their return to Tyre indicates that it is in the survival of the daughter, not the wife, that the father senses a defense against an oblivion in death. In Marina, Pericles has living material that will allow his image to shift and expand outward. Yet perhaps in an overreaction to the incest he saw in Antioch, Pericles is willing to separate himself from her as soon as she is born, by leaving her with Dioniza and Cleon at Tarsus. He makes it clear that he is not abandoning Marina but rather entrusting her to a noble household for proper upbringing till the day she is of marriageable age. Then he will return to reclaim her. To prove his intention, Pericles vows to leave his hair uncut: “Till she be married, madam / By bright Diana, whom we honor, all / unscissored shall this hair of mine remain / Thou I show ill in ‘t” (3.3.26-29).\footnote{This is the line from most editions. Delvecchio and Hammond redact the lines as “Till she be married, / Madam, by bright Diana whom we honour, / All unsistered shall this heir of mine remain, / Though I show will in’t” (3.3.26-29). Perhaps, but theirs is the less common reading. I have chosen to refer to the usual rendition, although the “show will” is more faithful to the Quarto than the “show ill” (Delvecchio and Hammond gloss it as meaning “a piece of wilfulness, a whim \textit{[OED, sv sb\textsuperscript{9b}].}”)} Cleon, Dioniza, and their daughter Philoten, the royal family of Tarsus, act as a surrogate family for Marina, letting her vicariously enjoy the security of family membership.

But then forms of the same death at play in Antioch come to Marina and Pericles. When Dioniza in Tarsus schemes to kill the grown Marina because she fears Marina is stealing her daughter Philoten’s suitors, Marina is taken to the beach to be killed by Leonine, one of Dioniza’s henchmen. There, as Leonine is about to strike the blow, pirates appear from the sea, stop him, and kidnap Marina. Later, they take her to Miteline and sell her to a brothel, which itself smacks of incest.\footnote{For prostitution’s similarities to incest (in that men of the same family can have sex with the same girl), see Donavin 82.} Back at Tarsus, when Pericles eventually returns for Marina, supposing she is still alive and now ready for marriage, he
is told that she has died and is shown the fake tomb. In Pericles’ mind, his daughter is dead, and thus dies his hope of propagating his image through her. His own death, whenever it comes, now marks a final extinction for the man Pericles. At Tarsus, Pericles enters a catatonic state, a living death. He is unable to talk, to make any meaningful social contact with another person even though he still has a band of courtiers around him. He leaves Tarsus but keeps out at sea, away from any established community. The ship he travels in is fashioned as a prince’s coffin—“His banners sable, trimmed with rich expense” (5.0.19)—and Pericles is positioned under the deck, completely enclosed by its walls.\(^\text{113}\)

For Marina at Miteline, however, the threat of death is not as profound as it is for Pericles. Marina is at the point of her life when, under normal situations, she would begin to pull away from the bond between herself and her father to seek a new bond with a surrogate father, a husband. As seen in Thaisa’s premarital state, the daughter deals with the isolated position of being temporarily unconnected to any male figure during this liminal period by hyperactivity in one of the areas through which her former bond with her father expressed itself. Thaisa’s correct union with her father had fostered notions of voice and separate identity. She had stressed these things while she occupied the space between relationships with Simonides and Pericles: she had crystallized her voice into a letter and threatened to permanently isolate her body from her father. In Marina’s case, the hyperactivity also takes place in Marina’s words and separation. Ideally, words would be where the father/daughter intercourse takes place, as shown in the Simonides/Thaisa

model. Marina’s constant chattering and pleading delay Leonine, her would-be murderer, enough that, when he would finally land the killing blow, it is too late. The pirates have already come to kidnap Marina. And at the brothel, her talk preserves her still. “Fie, fie upon her,” the Bawd of the house proclaims:

“she’s able to freeze the god Priapus and undo a whole generation. [. . .] [S]he has me her quirks, her reasons, her master-reasons, her prayers, her knees, that she would make a puritan of the devil if he should cheapen a kiss of her.” (4.5.12-17)

As Antiochus did with his daughter, Marina’s masters Bawd, Pander, and Boult view her in terms of consumption. When Boult wants to ravish Marina, he views her as a joint of meat, and Bawd gives him permission to “cut a morsel of the spit” (4.2.105-06). The rest of the prostitutes in the house are viewed as physical material in desperate need of replacement: “The stuff we have,” Bawd says, “a strong wind will blow it to pieces, they are so pitifully sodden” (4.2.15-16). And as in Antioch, here in the brothel deception reigns as a way to bring men to death.\footnote{Pander admits that two of the brothel’s three prostitutes are diseased and that they are killing the customers: “[T]here’s two unwholesome a’ conscience, the poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the baggage” (4.2.17-18). This is before Marina arrives at the brothel.} Bawd claims dissembling is proper to a prostitute’s part (4.2.93-98), but Marina refuses to comply in the deception. Instead, she trumps her masters, confusing them with her words. For her, here, equivocation is a form of protection.

Yet there are times when Marina loses her words. Later in the play, Lysimachus tells Hellicanus of one of Marina’s peculiar habits: “She never would tell her parentage; /
Being demanded that, she would sit still and weep” (5.1.183-84). This state mirrors the
state that Pericles is now in, in his coffin-ship. Recalling how Simonides’ loquacious
dughter and Antiochus’ silent one have displayed that the voice is a sign of life, one can
view Marina’s silent moments as minute instances of psychological death during which
Marina finds no vivifying relationship with a father.\textsuperscript{115} Marina was raised away from her
actual father, and although she has memorized a story of who he is,\textsuperscript{116} she has no real
experiences with him to fall back upon. But her muting is only temporary. The generative
powers inherent in Marina as a daughter carry her through these psychological dead
spots.

At one point in the brothel, Marina is visited by Lysimachus, the lustful governor of
the city. Reminding him of his alleged virtue as governor, she keeps him at a distance
with her words. Lysimachus is impressed:

\begin{quote}
I did not think
Thou couldst have spoke so well, ne’er dreamed thou couldst.
Had I brought hither a corrupted mind,
Thy speech had altered it, hold, here’s gold
For thee, persever in that clear way thou goest
And the gods strengthen thee. (4.5.94-99)
\end{quote}

Marina uses this gold to convince the owners of the brothel to let her earn them money

\textsuperscript{115} In her frequently cited essay, Inga-Stina Ewbank maintains that “Marina’s being is still held in her
words” (119). Amanda Piesse corroborates: “She [Marina] can articulate her own history and subsequently
has an unshakeable notion of self” (166). Both of these critics touch upon what I suggest here, that a sense
of one’s sense of being alive is partly grounded upon words that work to articulate the identity of the self
and its origins. But these critics do not examine these particular moments of Marina’s silence in the
brothels. This is an oversight in their arguments that has repercussions on their conclusions.

\textsuperscript{116} This is the story that her nurse Lychorida has taught her of how Pericles fought the storm when Marina
was born (4.1.51-63). Interestingly enough, when Marina walks unsuspectingly with Leonine, her assassin,
she unbiddingly tells him this story to fill the gaps of an awkward conversation. It is as if at that point she
resorts to images of her father when she subconsciously senses death.
not through sex (a physical activity) but through tutoring (a notional one): she will teach the noble youths of the city her arts (music, dance, embroidery) and will relinquish the payment to the bawds. Through Lysimachus, then, Marina finds a way to preserve her life. Because the gold preserves her virginity, membership in a family unit is still an option for Marina. What would stop this possibility is Marina’s sexual promiscuity through prostitution. As a result, prostitution is to Marina as deep a threat as was the incest at Antiochus to Pericles. What threatens is not sexual degradation of a family line—which is usually the way the incest of the opening scene is interpreted—but instead the complete end of a family line. In a way, and in keeping with the play’s focus on Pericles, this threat is leveled not only at Marina but also at Pericles. If Marina cannot produce grandchildren for Pericles, then upon his own physical death Pericles dies the more profound death of a man whose line has stopped.

The Pericles/Marina Pair, Part Two: Pericles

Time passes. Soon it is the season for the city of Miteline to make a feast to Neptune, its patron god. As the citizens celebrate, Lysimachus notices Pericles’ vessel floating into Miteline’s harbor. He boards a small ship and makes his way to the boat in order to find

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117 Several critics work the idea that the incest in Pericles brings about death to a community by sterilizing the matrix of legitimate succession. Constance Jordan has argued that the incest is a sign of tyranny, which, in turn, is a sign of communal death (343-47, 352). Prendergast seconds this: “Where Antiochus’ represssion of his daughter’s subjectivity and his execution of his suitors reveals his obsession with holding on to absolute power, Pericles is, from the beginning, represented as willing to recognize man’s ultimate powerless in the face of death. [. . .] The logic of Pericles, then, is paradoxical: Antiochus, who holds on to life by clinging to his daughter while demonstrating his absolute power over her suitors, soon dies a terrible death, leaving no progeny to continue his lineage; in contrast, Pericles, who keeps his mortality in mind, and who recognizes how little control he has over his fate, is immortalized as he recognizes that he is part of a past, present, and future lineage” (60-61).
out who the strange sailors are and what they want. He learns about Pericles, thinks
Marina may be able to help him with her almost magical words (having has no idea that
Marina is Pericles’ daughter), and with Hellicanus’ consent sends for Marina.

When Marina approaches Pericles aboard the boat, she makes sure that only she and
her “companion maid” (5.1.73) approach, causing the initial reunion to resemble that of
the triad of the nuclear family. She immediately seeks to present herself as a sympathetic
other with whom Pericles can identify. She highlights two points of connection, the “grief
equal to yours, if both were justly weighed” and her “derivation” which was “from
ancestors / Who stood equivalent to mighty kings” (5.1.82-86). This abrupt mentioning of
Marina’s parents jolts Pericles, causing him to communicate openly (and thus begin a
conceptual relationship) with Marina: “‘My fortunes—parentage—good parentage— / To
equal mine—’ Was it not thus?” he immediately asks (5.1.92-93).

Soon Pericles sees in Marina the contours of the images of his wife and daughter that
he has stored away in his mind. He confesses,

My dearest wife was like this maid,

And such a one my daughter might have been:

My queen’s square brows, her stature to an inch,

As wand-like straight, as silver-voiced, her eyes

As jewel-like and cased as richly [. . .] (5.1.101-06)

It is almost as if the stirrings of new life found in each one’s identification of the other
carry Marina and Pericles on an unstoppable current toward renewal. For the first time in
the play, Marina mentions her own name—“My name is Marina” (5.1.139)—and
connects herself directly with Pericles: “I am the daughter to King Pericles, / If good King Pericles be” (5.1.176). This bold affirmation of identity is just the thing Pericles needs. In his excitement he proclaims to Marina that she “begetst him that did thee beget” (5.1.190) and soon declares, “I am Pericles of Tyre” (5.1.199).

Pericles then hears the “music of the spheres,” falls into a swoon, and receives a vision from Diana, who instructs him to sacrifice to her at Ephesus (5.1.223-41). When he wakes up, he directs his crew accordingly. He asks Lysimachus for provisions, and the governor is ready to help, but for a favor in return: “Sir, with all my heart, / And when you come ashore I have another sleight” (5.1.250-51). Pericles answers, “You shall prevail were it to woo my daughter, / For it seems you have been noble towards her” (5.1.252-53). With such alacrity Pericles betroths Marina to Lysimachus.

The reunion scene with his daughter Marina brings Pericles out of his living death, and there is no doubt that this scene with its riddles, its fertile interchange between Marina and Pericles, and its rebirthing of Pericles by Marina, as depicted in the famous line “Thou that begetst him that did thee beget” (5.1.190), can be read along sexual structures. These structures, however, need to be grounded in the notion of countering death. The parole may be voiced in a sexually laden register, but the langue, if you will, is revealed in the strategies employed in avoiding death.

The mixing of the registers of sexuality and mortality, and the subsequent subordination of one under the other, is well illustrated, in my opinion, in the curious scene of Marina’s attempted assassination on the shores of Tarsus. Marina tells her initial assailant, Leonine,
My father, as nurse says, did never fear,
But cried “Good seamen!” to the sailors,
Galling his kingly hands haling ropes,
And clasping to the mast, endured a sea
That almost burst the deck.

_Leonine_: When was this?

_Marina_: When I was born. (4.1.52-57)

Heard aurally, these lines allow for an interesting interpretation: Pericles is acknowledging the newborn Marina as a worthy continuance of his line. In “Good seaman,” the play’s audience would have heard a pun: good _semen_. Thus by a dependency upon “the mast,” Pericles maintains a hold against death, or the billowing sea. As revealed by Dioniza’s jealousy of Marina and her motive for planning her murder, Marina indeed has proved a worthy offspring. In time, she will be the savior of Pericles, giving him, in his words, “another life / To Pericles thy father” (5.1.202-03).

Rightly, Pericles’ words refer to the vivifying change that he has experienced by means of Marina’s talk aboard his ship in the harbor of Miteline. But placed in the frame of the underlying notions of familial selfhood, they also refer forward to the time Marina will bear children that will carry the image of Pericles even further into the self-replenishing body of the future developing family. Once Pericles is back from his living death, he arranges immediately for the marriage of Marina to Lysimachus, a move that in its haste matches the speedy action of Simonides. Pericles initiates this movement of his non-material self away from his own body (the physical death of which he cannot avoid)
and toward a line of descendents. Pericles’ hope rests upon Marina, and given Marina’s powers, its chance of success is very good. After all, Marina has already proved herself as Pericles’ counter for death.

In his psychological paralysis, Pericles was unable to help himself. He may as well have been really dead. But before he entered this state, he had a daughter, and when this state came upon him, his daughter was of marriageable age and also separated from him. Her own power of voice and identity buoyed her during this time, and in this power she was able to come from behind the enemy’s line, so to speak, to resuscitate Pericles. Once Marina has performed this act of rescue and is betrothed to Lysimachus, she passes out of the liminal space and loses her volubility. For now, at least, her job is done.

**Conclusion: The Success of Simonides**

Many of the various scenes in *Pericles* can be seen as constituting a variegated picture gallery illustrating the general notion that individual parts are connected to larger wholes that affect the well-being of the parts. This perspective comes to the fore particularly well in the play’s description of the dynamics of a city. In Tyre, Hellicanus, who is socially under Pericles, says he looks to Pericles as “the plants look up to heaven, / From whence they have their nourishment” (1.2.55-56). Hellicanus admits he is supported by Pericles in much the same way that one part of a physical body is nourished by another part. This communication of nourishment is bidirectional. Pericles views himself as the top part of an organic being, similar to the tops of the trees, yet he recognizes that the trees’ nourishment comes from below. These “tops of trees [. . .] fence
the roots *they grow by* and defend them” (1.2.31, italics mine). Thus the city is taken to be an organic whole, and the individuals within the city are parts of that whole, nourishing it, even replacing its dying parts. Later, when the lords of Tyre think Pericles is dead because he has been absent for so long, they want to set up Hellicanus as king. Convinced that “this kingdom is without a head,” they are sure that it will “[s]oon fall to ruin” (2.4.35-36).

Furthermore, Pericles, as the prince of Tyre, is the ultimate representative of the city. When he is convinced that Tyre is in trouble, he tells Hellicanus that the situation makes “both my body pine and soul to languish” (1.2.32) and draws “sleep out of mine eyes, blood from my cheeks” (1.2.95-96). His physical state resembles the distressed, tense, and watchful state that, from Pericles and Hellicanus’ point of view, Tyre is already in because of the matter of Antioch. At Tarsus, too, an identity between city and ruler is demonstrated. The city is in a famine, and Dioniza the queen says, “Our cheeks and hollow eyes do witness it” (1.4.52), as if with the death of the communal body, its diminutive mirrors (the bodies of the king and queen) also die.

When individual parts accept their positions in larger wholes, doing what they can to encourage the expansion and renewal of the whole, they can profit from reciprocal benefits. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* portrays an individual’s main reciprocal benefit to be the dilution of the person into a family, which, because it survives the death of the

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118 For an extended, historical analysis on how the Early Modern political body is framed poetically as a physical body, how this frame firsts gets accepted as a legitimate political perspective viewing communities *sub specie corporis*, and then how the perspective transfers to the physical bodies of the rulers of the community, see Barkan 77-90.

119 Constance Jordan’s analysis on Jacobean politics substantiates this general notion of identifying a political body with the physical body of a ruler with examples from late Elizabethan/early Jacobean political theory. See Jordan 335-36.
individual, can mitigate the effect of one’s physical death. Since an actual individual obviously dies, the mitigation must take place along a conceptual framework. The idea that one survives death because he produces new life in his image helps one to devalue the actual physical demise.

Consequently, Pericles is right when he responds to Antiochus’ riddle, “All love the womb that their first being bred” (1.1.108). The play never questions this initial love one has for the female matrix that initially produced one’s physical existence. But this line may be read in two ways: not only is there a time when an entity moves from the state of non-existence to existence, but there are also states beyond this “first being.” A subsequent mode of being is hinted at in the next line of the couplet, when Pericles makes a request of Antiochus: “Then give my tongue like leave, to love my head” (1.1.109). On one level, Pericles is simply saying that he does not want to voice the answer because he does not want to be beheaded. On another level, though, Pericles is referring to himself as a tongue. The word tongue in this line corresponds to the All of the prior line, a category that necessarily includes Pericles. And the word head, with its housing of the tongue being similar to the way a torso of a pregnant woman houses a fetus, corresponds to womb. The juxtapositioning of the lines also suggests that the word tongue, although full of connotations of flesh and muscle, is in fact representative of the second mode of being, a mode that situates one inside a cerebral, ideational context (the head, or the mind). If Pericles calls himself a tongue, he equates himself to a fleshly organ whose main social purpose is to exchange words with other “tongues.” If this reading is right, Pericles reveals in these lines his propensity to view himself not only as a physical being whose
life depends upon a larger whole (as the physical tongue depends upon the physical head), but also as someone who must constantly be aware of the higher plane of notional entities, just as a tongue is constantly giving voice to the notional entities of words.

Pericles’ hope is essentially Simonides’ reality. Simonides begets Thaisa, and Thaisa gives birth to Marina. Marina, then, would be the granddaughter who is eventually to give a new lease on life to the image and remembrance of Simonides, if the dynamic of a father’s use of an expanding, exogamous family to counter an obliviating death is as I have drawn it up to be. By the end of the play, Marina has done just this.

First, she keeps her own demise at bay by her words. Living in a sort of stasis at Miteline, she escapes the brothel’s pollution, but she still has no recognizable place in a family line. When Marina speaks with Pericles, however, she discovers her connection with her father and is fully revived by the reunion. After Marina’s first words to Pericles, she says to herself, “there is something glows upon my cheek / And whispers in mine ear ‘go not till he speak’” (5.1.90-91). More often than not, editors gloss this line as a reference to an apparent blow Pericles has just delivered to Marina. This is plausible, as Pericles asks later, “Didst thou not say when I did push thee back, / Which was when I perceived thee, that thou camst / From good descending?” (5.1.123-25, italics mine). However, unless Pericles has euphemized the action (with a “push thee back” instead of, say, a “strike thee”), there is no reason to insist that Pericles physically struck Marina on the face. The glow on Marina’s cheek might be, as Delvecchio and Hammond describe it in their gloss, “an inward prompting, the excitement of which causes her cheek to flush.”
It is the flush of the stirrings of new life.\(^{120}\)

Because Marina can pull Pericles out of his stupor, she becomes an indirect cause for the resurrection of Thaisa. Pericles does not know this, but Cerimon, a physician at Ephesus and a priest of Diana, found Thaisa’s coffin among the washed-up debris of the storm so long ago. He pried it open, recognized Thaisa as a royal personage, and revived her by his natural arts. When Thaisa understood what had happened, she decided to enter Diana’s services as a nun in her temple, believing she would never see Pericles again. Thaisa takes the vow of celibacy and silence, so even though she is psychologically sound, she is socially dead. She communicates with nobody, and there seems to be no chance that she will create new progeny to carry on Simonides’ issue. She is still in Ephesus when Pericles arrives. When Pericles obeys Diana’s command to reiterate his history before her altar, Thaisa hears. A deeply hidden version of Thaisa emerges to exclaim, “You are, you are, O royal Pericles!” (5.3.13).\(^{121}\) His own words have opened communication with Thaisa, and she rises to the opportunity to reclaim her full identity and to reposition herself in the family unit.

Like Pericles’ recovery, Thaisa’s revolves around the logocentric, not the physical. Thaisa is awakened by Pericles’ voice, and when she cries out, “O my lord, are you not Pericles? / Like him you spake” (5.3.29-30), he recognizes her by her voice, exclaiming,

\(^{120}\) In comparison to Cerimon’s description of Thaisa as she begins to awake from her stupor—“Gentlemen, this queen will live; / Nature awakes, a warmth breathes out of her. / […] / See how she ’gins to blow into life’s flower again” (3.2.89-92)—it is possible to conjecture that Marina’s ruddy cheek is a narrative element meant to parallel Thaisa’s resurrection.

\(^{121}\) Another mark of Thaisa’s social death is that she has been silent till Pericles’ return. When she faints, Pericles asks, “What means the mum?” (5.3.14). The OED lists a definition of mum as “A silent person” and quotes only a letter from Locke as an example (see def. A.3). I believe Delvecchio and Hammond right in keeping the word as mum (as opposed to the usual editorial emendation to nun), seeing Shakespeare’s use of it here is another instance of the OED’s definition.
“The voice of dead Thaisa” (5.3.31). The words and names exchanged between the two become the platform upon which a figurative blending of Pericles, Thaisa, and Marina into one larger, living entity can be constructed:

*Pericles:* This, this! No more, you gods, your present kindness

Makes my past miseries sports: you shall do well

That on the touching of her lips I may melt,

And no more be seen.

O come, *be buried a second time within these arms.*

*Marina [kneels]:* My heart leaps to be gone into my mother’s bosom.

*Pericles:* Look who kneels here: *flesh of thy flesh,* Thaisa,

Thy burden at the sea, and called Marina,

For she was yielded there.

*Thaisa [raises and embraces her]:* Blest, and my own. (5.3.37-44, italics mine)

This larger entity extends backward to include the ancestors responsible for its parts.

Thaisa is quick to recognize something of Simonides in Pericles—“Now I know you better,” she says to Pericles, “When we with tears parted Pentapolis / The king my father gave you such a ring” (5.3.34-36). She uses vestiges of Simonides’s existence to identify Pericles, her new Simonides.

Simonides has since died (5.3.74), but his existence still reverberates in Pericles, the substitute he picked for himself in his relationship with his daughter. When Pericles finds out about Simonides’ death, he replies to Thaisa:

Heavens make a star of him. Yet there my queen,
We’ll celebrate their nuptials, and ourselves
Will in that kingdom spend our following days;
Our son and daughter shall in Tyrus reign. (5.3.75-78)

Marina will marry Lysimachus at Simonides’ court, not in Tyre, and she and Pericles will remain there to rule in Simonides’ stead. The daughter’s daughter returns to the court of the dead (grand)father to officially carry on the line he started. Furthermore, the daughter and Pericles, her father’s substitute, will stand in the dead father’s place to represent him, carry out his duties, and remind his people of his good name. Marina and Lysimachus, once they have been married, will go to Tyre to rule in Marina’s father’s place.

Fertile daughters are not the perfect counter to an all-erasing personal death. The music of the play contains a few sad notes. Cleon, king of Tarsus, is a just man, unlike his scheming queen who plots to kill Marina behind his back. She suffers his sharp rebuke when he finds out what she has done (4.3.1-28). Yet he is part of a family body that includes himself, Dioniza, and his daughter Philoten, and when his citizens find out what Dioniza has done to Marina, they make no distinction of persons in their zeal to right the wrong done to Pericles, whom they still venerate. In killing the whole, they kill all the individual parts, good or bad—“him and his they in his palace burn” (“Epilogue,” line 14). But for Simonides, his daughter and granddaughter shelter him from a complete death. His early decision to give away his daughter instead of hoarding her now pays its dividends by creating new bodies in his image. Pericles imitates Pericles’ actions when he marries Marina to Lysimachus and sends them both in his place to rule at Tyre as surrogates of himself. Perhaps upon his own death, he will enjoy the same good fortune
through Marina’s children.
Chapter 4

John Donne, Godly Inscription, and Permanency of Self in
*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*

In *Pericles* Shakespeare emphasized the role descendents have in mitigating the physical death of the ancestors. At its core, a family is a community, an organic collective capable of replacing its individual dying parts with new living ones to keep the whole alive. To operate properly in this community, that is, to act in ways that facilitate the family’s ongoing life as a unit, the father must view his children primarily as notional entities, for whereas certain activities between father and child are strictly prohibited on a physical level, on a conceptual one these same activities can become legitimate and beneficial. To corporeally invade a daughter’s body is to deviate into incest; to notionally invade it is to mingle identities in a most intricate and intimate skein of affection, respect, and understanding. To literally marry one’s own daughter is to stop the family line through that daughter; to figuratively marry her by means of a surrogate self (a carefully chosen husband from the community at large) is to extend one’s form outward from one’s dying body and into the newer bodies of forthcoming grandchildren.

John Donne had a wife, and he had daughters who eventually married and had children of their own. But he did not look to any of them for help in his own battles against death. Instead, Donne embraced the same notional perspective found in *Pericles*
but at a different, deeper level. The underlying principle at work in the community of the self-propagating, regenerating family is a connectivity that effects a beneficial dilution of the individual self, spreading it outward throughout the whole. For Donne, this connectivity is at work in not just the family but the world—the universe—as a whole. All things connect, all things participate in the natures of all other things, and all find a permanence of being in a notional center, the logocentric mind of God. Consequently, Donne came to view his body as a notion, a sign whose essence has a permanent existence only insofar as it is diluted or mixed into the being of God.

**Donne’s Fear of Death**

In late November and early December of 1623, in his eighth year as an Anglican minister, John Donne suffered a major illness that brought him close to death. The illness may have been typhoid fever, but recent research suggests relapsing fever in combination with another illness (Raspa xii-xiv). Donne was bedridden for over two weeks, during which he was examined by three doctors. Probably due to the natural course of Donne’s disease rather than to these doctors’ questionable skill (one of their treatments was to cut pigeons in half and to hold the bleeding halves to the soles of Donne’s feet), Donne survived.  

In the following weeks of convalescence, he penned his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in My Sickness* (henceforth, *Devotions*). The book is a collection of twenty-three devotions. Each devotion contains a meditation, an

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122 He lived another eight years, dying 31 March 1631, probably from stomach cancer. He was either 59 or 60 years old (his birth month is not known).
expostulation, and a prayer. The meditation is a soliloquy of sorts, using no scriptural
texts and focusing on observations of natural phenomena and the flux of physical being.
The expostulation and the prayer address God directly, weave Scripture into their texts,
and express an attitudinal stance (deliberative in the expostulations and subordinate in the
prayers). The narrative course of the book takes the reader from the inception of Donne’s
illness through the medical examinations and finally to the point where recovery is
imminent. Metaphysical conceits and correspondences abound; aside from some of
Donne’s sermons, the Devotions is one of Donne’s most poetical prose works.

It is also one of his most troubling. It is troubling because one gets the sense that the
book is not really what it seems. As an alleged piece of Early Modern devotional
literature, it is much too individualized to be a solid representation of the genre. In
fact, it is quite the anomaly: “the book seems to fit, comfortably or uncomfortably, no
easily recognized category of contemporary devotional literature, whether one examines
prayer books, spiritual conduct books, manuals for the sick or dying, or even popular
meditative forms” (Frost 5). Beyond this, it is troubling for its unusually dark tone and
imagery of decay and degeneration. After reading animadversions like “O perverse way,
irregular motion of Man; even rising it selfe [out of bed] is the way to Ruine”
(Meditation 21; 110), or “Man hath no center, but misery; there and only there, hee is
fixt, and sure to find himself” (Meditation 21; 111), or “as long as I remaine in this great

123 For more on the uniqueness of Donne’s Devotions in light of the English devotional tradition, see
Partridge 200, Bottrall 23-26, Andreasen 207-08, White 253, and Webber 188-89. There are those who
would disagree with Frost. Some of these have argued for the influence of certain Catholic models (some
even for Protestant ones) to the Devotions. See Papazian 616, note 1, for a cataloguing of these arguments.
124 For all references to the Devotions, page numbers after the semicolons refer to Anthony Raspa’s
MaGill-Queen’s edition.
Hospitall, this sicke, this deseasedfull world, as long as I remaine in this leprous house, this flesh of mine, this Heart [...] will still be subject by the invasion of maligne and pestilent vapours” (Expostulation 11; 60), one cannot but wonder what exactly is fueling the invective.125

An event concurrent with the sickness and the writing of the Devotions may offer a clue. Sometime during this sickness Donne wrote the poem “A Hymn to God the Father,” in which he expresses a certain fear of death: “I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne / My last thred, I shall perish on the shore” (lines 17-18; Donne, Complete 270).126 To counter this fear, Donne asks God for a promise. Donne wants God to swear “that at my death thy sonne / Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore” (lines 19-20; 270). What Donne is afraid of is either some sort of rude, postmortem awakening that would reveal the afterlife to be inimical to Donne’s soul (Donne awakes from death to find out that he is a non-elect, damned forever) or no awakening at all (Christianity’s promise of resurrection is a lie). Enough has been written to show that toward the end of his life Donne never really doubted his election.127 So perhaps in this poem Donne was

125 Other similar ejaculations are “Wee say, the Elements of man are misery, and happinesse, as though he had an equal proportion of both [...] But it is far from that; hee drinks misery, & he tastes happinesse; he mowes misery, and hee gleanes happinnesse; hee journies in misery, he does but walke in happennesse” (Meditation 13; 67) and “I would not make Man worse then hee is, Nor his Condition more miserable then it is. But could I though I would? As a Man cannot flatter God, nor over prayeze him, so a Man cannot injure Man, nor undervalue him” (Meditation 14; 71).

126 All quotations of Donne’s poetry are from Charles M. Coffin’s 1952 edition, The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne. As I do with Raspa’s text, I will list Coffin’s page numbers after the verse numbers.

127 In the first prayer of the Devotions, Donne petitions God to help him “to looke forward to mine end, and to looke backward to, to the considerations of thy mercies afforded mee from the beginning; that so by that practise of considering thy mercy, in my beginning in this world, when thou plantedst me in the Christian Church, and thy mercy in the beginning in the other world, when thou writest me in the Booke of Life, in my Election, I may come to a holy consideration of thy mercy, in the beginning of all my actions here” (Prayer 1; 10). Papazian has taken pains to show that the verb writest here is in past tense, signaling an act already done (609-10). Furthermore, according to Izaak Walton’s testimony, Donne expressed this
expressing a fear of annihilation. If so, the diatribe in the *Devotions* may well have been a reaction to this fear.

That Donne feared a personal annihilation at the moment of death has been argued extensively by at least two critics. Mark Allinson alleges that “[a] central worry for Donne was that God himself, through Christ, had passively surrendered to death,” to rise no more (38). Allinson’s thesis is that this fear of annihilation gave rise to a heroic (Jungian) self-image in Donne’s prose work that enabled Donne to fight the abyss of death even when he strongly suspected the fight was futile (33). Besides Allinson, Robert Watson argues that “Donne’s fundamental concern about [the] Last Judgment is not whether God will forgive our sins, but instead whether He will restore our existence” (157) and that Donne constructed “a broadly consistent mythology [. . .] in order to reassure himself that the embrace of his body and mind was unbreakable” (159). Watson’s thesis is that critics “have long mistaken (as lust and, later, zeal) the disease of annihilationist doubt that ate away at Donne’s heart, and spoke at one remove through his secular lyrics,” failing to see that these secular love poems “pursue immortality by an inventive system of substitution [of] love replacing death in the manageable universe of poetic creation” (167).

What both Allinson and Watson have in common is this idea that Donne engaged in same hope even a few weeks before his death. In response to a friend’s query concerning his concentrated demeanor, Donne replied that he had been meditating upon his life and upcoming death, noting the blessings of God upon his activity and enjoying the sense that “though of myself I have nothing to present to him but sins and misery, yet I know he looks not upon me now as I am of myself but as I am in my Savior and hath given me even at this present time some testimonies by his holy Spirit that I am of the number of his elect. I am therefore full of inexpressible joy and shall die in peace” (Walton 268). See also Goldberg 511 and Targoff 142 on how Donne turned his bouts with sickness into platforms for displaying the signs of election.
the act of writing per se in order to counter the threat of being annihilated by death. In this paper I will use this same notion but with some differences. Whereas both Allinson and Watson suppose that Donne feared a permanent annihilation, I will argue that Donne feared the space between the physical death of his body and the physical resurrection of the same—a temporary annihilation, so to speak. And whereas Allinson suggests that Donne wrote for courage and Watson that Donne wrote for sublimation, I will suggest that Donne wrote for permanency.

This achievement of a permanency of self occurs through a process of relocation. Donne was keenly aware of the natural course of generation and degeneration. The evidence suggests that Donne viewed his own body as part of an atomic ebb and flow governed by biological humors. Because of certain implications arising from a humoral understanding of the body, Donne may have seen his soul complicit with his body in this physical movement toward non-being. In contrast, Donne would have perceived God as exactly the opposite of the physical cycle. Donne’s God is the ground for all permanence, the center of changelessness. Donne’s first step in the process of achieving permanency of being was, then, for him to step out of his body, as it were, in order to begin relocating his core self in God’s eternal being.

The spectatorial stance Donne assumes in the Devotions allows him to distance himself from his body. He distances himself from the body in order to gaze upon its deficiencies. His recordings of these deficiencies are an essential part of the Devotions, which becomes for Donne almost a substitute body. The Devotions provides him a partial solution to the problem of the degenerating self: the book’s textual content—its
meaning—is captured in the semantic form that Donne chooses to give it (in this case, a particularly material one) and remains crystallized in this order through publication. God, as the divine Logos who publishes himself in all created things, is the ultimate grounds for this alleged stability and materiality of the word. Donne’s final project, then, would have been to situate himself completely in God. This is not to say that Donne spiritualizes himself in a mystical dissolving of the individual self into the Divine Self. Rather, the process culminates in Donne’s turning his body into a collage of signs, turning the collage into a text, and storing the text in the unchanging mind of God.

The Transient Nature of the Human Being

To fill out this sketch of my argument, I will begin with Donne’s view of the human body as atomic and humoral. Passages in sermons written when Donne had achieved a certain theological maturity indicate that he believed in the atomic fluctuation and eventual dissolution of the body. “For us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead,” Donne claims, “we must all pass this posthumous death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and purification, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave” (Donne, Sermons 10.238). In speaking of his belief that God can resurrect various parts of a scattered body, Donne describes the extent of the dispersal, saying, “Where be all the splinters of that Bone, which a shot hath shivered and scattered in the Ayre? Where be all the Atoms of that flesh, which a Corrasive hath eat away, or a Consumption hath breath’d, and exhal’d away from our arms, and other Limbs?” (Donne,
Sermons 8.98). This mixing applies to the atoms of matter, the elements experiencing “vicissitudinary transmutation into one another” (Donne, Sermons 7.271), and it applies to the dust of man—“That private and retired man, that thought himself his own for ever, and never came forth, must in his dust of the grave be published” to combine “with the dust of every highway and every dunghill” (Donne, Sermons 10.239).

The first seven words of the devotions set the same theme—“Variable, and therefore miserable condition of Man” (Meditation 1; 7). The extent of this variableness as it relates to the elements themselves is illustrated by the body in death, which, according to Donne

is making haste to lose the name of a body, and dissolve to putrefaction. Who would not bee affected, to see a cleere & sweet River in the Morning, grow a kennell of muddy land water by noone, and condemned to the saltiness of the Sea by night? And how lame a Picture, how faint a representation, is that, of the precipitation of mans body to dissolution? Now all the parts built up, and knit by a lovely soule, now but a statue of clay, and now, these limbs melted off, as if that clay were but snow; and now, the whole house is but a handfull of sand, so much dust, and but a pecke of Rubbidge. (Devotion 18; 92-93)

The human body oscillates between water and dirt, giving up one form to take up another, all forms undercut by the melting action of dissolution.

In addition to this atomic view of the dead body, Donne espouses a humoral

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128 Suggesting that in this atomistic view Augustine influenced Donne, David A. Hirsch points out that in The City of God Augustine says that the bodily disintegration is complete, “part going into dust, part into air, part into fire, part into the entrails of beasts and birds, part being drowned and dissolved into water” (93, note 39).
physiology governing the living body. Galen’s basic analysis and the various permutations it underwent as it made its way through the medieval world into the Early Modern do not need to be revisited here. What does need to be mentioned are a few notions of this theory that are particularly pertinent to Donne’s predicament. The theory that the four humors (phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile) in balance created perfect health in the body rests upon a commitment to materialistic determinism that undercuts the possibility of a stable self. According to Nancy Selleck, the humoral body is “ever newly made up of its physical context, which it takes in and converts to itself,” engaging in an “ongoing process of being remade by what it consumes and digests,” and in this process “the boundaries between this rather porous body and its environment never stabilize” (150-51). Thus, holding to a humoral view of the body, one cannot really be sure of the true boundaries of the physical body or, if one could be sure of this, whether the body within those boundaries was the same body one had, say, a year ago. Selleck summarizes the predicament when she notes, “Humoral theory can thus suggest a field-based identity: who you are is determined by your physical context as well as by the unstable context of your body, and changes as a result of that involvement with context” (152).

Another important tenet inherent in humoral theory is that the existence of the apparently non-material soul is actually dependent upon the physical dynamics of the humors. Edward W. Tayler, who in his work on Donne’s Anniversary poems examines briefly this issue of humoral function, writes that “the humors begin their work in the liver as natural spirits, are refined in the heart to become vital spirits, and in moving to
the brain, are “transmuted into intellectual or animal (anima, ‘soul’) spirits,” some of which remain in the brain “to support the operations of the sensus communis, the imagination, the memory, and the intellect” (55). This medical theory suggests that the nature of the soul itself, not just its activity, is somehow caused by these refined vapors, these animal spirits. If so, the existence of the soul would be due in part to the existence of the humoral vapors. Accordingly, since the humors themselves exist insofar as the human body exists, the deterioration of the body leads to the deterioration of the soul.

In light of Donne’s beliefs, it is possible that Donne thought that the soul would dissolve with the body. Donne’s writings suggest that he believed the humoral vapors of the body somehow caused the soul’s existence, or at least greatly influenced its nature. This notion partially underlies the tenor of his early Metempsychosis poem “The Progress of the Soule” as well as his Second Anniversary poem “Of the Progress of the Soule,” but the usefulness of these early poems to a study attempting to understand Donne’s basic position on the soul’s genesis is compromised by the poems’ irony and relatively early position in Donne’s corpus. His later work is a more reliable index to Donne’s settled convictions, and in this later work, most notably his sermons, Donne gives credence to the idea of the body causing the vegetative soul, which, in turn, causes the sensitive soul. Both “arise out of the temperament, and good disposition of which that man is made, they arise out of man himself” (Donne, Sermons 3.85). Richard Suggs has noted that when Donne preached “that ‘an idle soul, is a monster in a man . . . ’ and that, ‘that soul that does not think, not consider, cannot be said to actuate (which is the proper operation of the soul) but to evaporate; not to work in the body, but to breathe, and smoke
through the body,’ he certainly appears to indicate a porous boundary between moral
force and physical vitality” (152). Besides the *Sermons*, in the *Devotions* Donne claimed
that “the foure Elements” hold “a Soveraignty equally shed upon them all” over man’s
“very being” (Meditation 11; 56, emphasis Donne’s) and that his heart (which equates to
“soul”) could be affected by vapors: “this Heart, though thus prepared for thee, prepared
by thee, will still be subject to the invasion of maligne and pestilent vapours”
(Expostulation 11; 60). In the complete triad of Devotion 12, he openly subscribes to the
idea of vapors affecting the body and the soul (62-67).

It makes sense to think that if the soul is this involved with the physical makeup of
the body, it will not survive the body’s decomposition. This issue of what exactly will
happen to the soul at the point of death was certainly a live one for Donne. Commenting
on then-current theories of the origin of the soul, Donne said: “I care the lesse, how darke
the entrance of my soule, into my body, bee to my reason. It is the going out, more than
the coming in, that concerns us. This soule, this Bell tells me is gone out; Whither? Who
shall tell mee that?” (Meditation 18; 92). Without doubt, Donne believed in an ultimate
resurrection, a final union of the purified soul with a regenerated body:

And yet, *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, unto God the Lord belongs the issues
of death*, and by recompacting this dust into the same body, and reanimating the
same body with the same soule, hee shall in a blessed and glorious resurrection
give mee such an issue from this death, as shal never passe into any other death,
but establish me into a life that shall last as long as the Lord of life himself.
(Donne, *Sermons* 10.239-40)
Because of this belief, the death of the soul that Donne is concerned about in the
*Devotions* is not a permanent annihilation but instead must be that of a temporal black-
out taking place between a person’s physical death and a resurrection of the dead on the
Last Day. In a sermon Donne asserted, “In the constitution and making of a natural man,
the body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up
the man” (Donne, *Sermons* 2.261). Therefore, regardless of whether the soul dies with the
body or flies immediately to God, the person—if a person is the union of the body and
soul, not just the body itself or the soul itself—is rubbed out until the soul reunites with
the body. At death, then, Donne’s body would be dissolving in the grave and his soul
rejoicing in heaven, but Donne himself would be nowhere. If this is the case, then
although the soul may survive the body after death, the man Donne does not.\(^{129}\) To
Donne this erasure would have been a definite and insufferable loss of self (Sugg 194),

\(^{129}\) At times, Donne professes vigorously that he, the real Donne, is his soul—“But I am more then* dust
& ashes*; I am my best part, I am my *soule* (Expostulation 1; 8, emphasis Donne’s)—and that this soul upon
the body’s death would immediately transfer itself from the body to heaven. Thus Donne’s assertion in
“Holy Sonnet VI” that when

gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space,
But my ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose feare already shakes my every joynt;
Then, as my soule, to’t heven her first seate, takes flight,
And earth-borne body, in the earth shall dwell,
So, fall my sinnes, that all may have their right,
To where they are bred, and would presse me, to hell.   (lines 5-12; 249)

At other times he undercut this position. In the very next sonnet, “Holy Sonnet VII,” where he described
the final resurrection, he commandes,

At the round earths imagin’d corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberlesse infinities
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe.   (lines 1-4; 249)

Regardless of the slippage of these poems, I take Donne’s position to be that which he expresses in the
*Sermons*: the combination of the body and the soul produces a new entity, the self, which is larger than its
components (2.261). Although in Donne’s scheme apparently the soul can survive without the body, neither
the body nor one’s awareness of selfhood survives when the soul departs the body.
and this is what Donne feared.

The Permanent Logocentric Nature of God

In contrast to his view of the devastating mutability of the human body and the instability of the self, Donne sees God’s nature as completely constant, the exemplar of permanence. “There is nothing more contrary to God, and his proceedings” Donne writes, “then annihilation, to Bee nothing” (Donne, *Sermons* 4.85). In the *Devotions*, the opposition is emphasized at the very beginning, where mankind is described as variable and God as immortal. It is repeated at the end, where Donne explicitly admits his dissolution and confesses God’s constancy (Prayer 23; 126). This is the last prayer of the *Devotions*, but every prayer of the twenty-three devotions except four (the second, third, fourth, and sixth) starts by openly mentioning the eternal nature of God. Moreover, throughout the treatise, Donne associates sickness with death. Because he would have his God be immortal, he never depicts God as sick—“God is presented to us under many human affections, as far as infirmities; God is called angry, and sorry, and weary, and heavy; but never a sicke God: for then hee might die like men, as our gods [kings] do” (Meditation 8; 41). It is not that God is simply beyond death. Rather, God has power over death, controls it, uses it for his glory (Prayer 15; 83). And it is not that God simply possesses eternal life as one would possess an object that can be dispossessed; instead, God is life (Prayer 4; 23). Thus Donne develops an equation between God and Being itself, saying, “If we bee compar’d with God, our Being with his Being, we have no Being at all, wee are Nothing. For Being is the peculiar and proper name of God” (Donne,
If Donne wants to achieve self-permanency, he would have to move the locus of his being from his own body of decay and into the eternally stable being of God. Donne’s defense against death as annihilation rests in his attempt to see his existence as continually and presently grounded not in his body but rather in God’s mind. This process of relocation begins with holy imitation on two levels: imitation of nature and imitation of activity. The more Donne imitates God’s characteristics of being and doing, the less he has to follow the pattern of human variance. The starting place would have to be God’s nature, and from there, since it is governed by God’s nature, God’s activity.

For Donne, God’s nature is logocentric. God himself is *Verbum* (Donne, *Sermons* 8.52), and his being rests upon the principles of *Logos*—words and reason (Donne, *Sermons* 4.119; 5.103). As such, God codes himself as a system of divine propositions that are eternally fixed in divine truth. This propositional nature of God is perfectly stable, expressing itself in the creative act but not dependent upon creation or the act of creation for its existence (Anderson 190-91, 200-05). Thus, the ideational center of God is not so much a steady fountain of words issuing forth as it is a set of written words secure in their arrangement because of their inscription upon a divine page that is God’s mind. God has revealed these truth in Scripture. Therefore, when one reads the Scriptures in the correct way, he or she will, according to Donne, actually see God through his or her understanding of the words themselves (Donne, *Sermons* 9.355).

Donne insists on language as the foundational register of God’s selfhood and his revelation thereof:
My God, my God, Thou art a direct God, may I not say, a literall God, a God that wouldest bee understood literally, and according to the plaine sense of all that thou saiest? But thou art also [. . .] a figurative, a metaphoricall God too: A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such Curtains of Allegories, such third Heavens of Hyperboles, so harmonious eloquutions [. . .]. Neither art thou thus a figurative, a Metaphoricall God, in thy word only, but in thy workes too. The stile of thy works, the phrase of thine Actions, is metaphoricall. The institution of thy whole worship in the old Law, was a continuall Allegory; types & figures overspread all; and figures flowed into figures [. . .]. Neither didst thou speake, and worke in this language, onely in the time of thy Prophets; but since thou spokest in thy Son, it is so too. How often, how much more often doth they Sonne call himselfe a way, and a light, and a gate, and a Vine, and bread, than the Sonne of God, or of Man? How much oftner doth he exhibit a Metaphoricall Christ, than a reall, a literall?

(Expostulation 19; 99-100)

If one wants to understand God’s essence in itself (the plain sense, the letters [literae] of God), then one must receive God as a word, as Scripture (“all that thou saiest”). But if one wants to see God in the physical world that continually comes into and goes out of being, then one must recognize the manifestation of God through these transient physical figures. There is only one Scripture that is read (the Bible), but there is a plurality of

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130 Elsewhere Donne insisted that God intended “to express things by allegories, by figures; so that in many places in Scripture, a figurative sense is the literall sense” (Sermons 4.2).
figural manifestations that are exhibited through the physical language of nature. In this material expression, God displays the creative copiousness of his mind.

**Donne’s Defense against Death: Inscribing the Body into God’s Mind**

Donne’s escape from his fear of his material body’s precipitous course toward apparent annihilation would have depended on his imitative ability to position himself in relation to his sickness as God positions himself in relation to the created (yet dying) world. The physical world is, for Donne, meant to be a collection of dispensable signs that allow an audience to “read” God; it does not exist in its own right for its own propagation. These physical signs wear out and are replaced, but what they refer to—God—never changes. The cycle of generation and degeneration is in place to manifest God’s creative copiousness. In the same way, and particularly for the reason that it is materially involved in this cycle, Donne’s body is designed to eventually waste away in order that it may be replaced with a new body, a new sign. Donne’s present body serves to figure the eternal qualities of a redeemed self to an audience. It does not exist to be an eternal entity in itself.

Donne begins this godly imitation by learning how to observe his body as a sign. In the *Devotions*, he assumes the role of an anatomist in order to move his self-consciousness away from his materially decaying body: “They have seene me, and heard mee, arraign’d mee in these fetters, and receiv’d the *evidence*; I have cut up mine own *Anatomy*, dissected myself, and they are gon to *read* upon me” (Meditation 9; 45-46). Here Donne takes possession of the dissection; he represents himself as the one
performing the cutting, the opening, the *publishing* of his body. And Donne repeats this emphasis on himself as anatomist: “They who have received my *Anatomy* of my selfe, *consult*, and end their *consultation* in *prescribing*” (Meditation 9; 47), and “I open my infirmities, I anatomise my *body* to them” (Expostulation 9; 48).

When he reflects upon his body, Donne the spectator positions it as an object distanced from himself, distanced in order to be viewed. Distance necessitates a separation, and separation necessitates a distinction in identities. When Donne views his body, then, he himself—as observer—becomes something other than his body, which is now at a remove from the observer in order to be viewed. As a result of his insistence on viewing his own body, Donne is able to hypothesize a dimension where the real self is beyond physical representation. The anatomist, working within a visual register of bodily terms, cannot glance away from the body and toward pure self-consciousness without losing the very tools of the anatomist. This is not to say that knowledge of the self cannot be grasped. Donne wrote that “no *Anatomist* can say, in dissecting a *body*, here lay the *coale*, the *fuell*, the *occasion* of all *bodily diseases*, but yet *a man* may have such a knowledge of his owne constitution, and bodily inclination to *diseases*, as that he may *prevent* his *danger* in a great part” (Expostulation 22; 119). A person can have a sense, then, of one’s “owne constitution, and bodily inclination,” but this sense must come via means other than a bodily dissection, for the anatomist can never point out the physical matrix for the body’s aberrations. What can be seen by the eye of the body must consequently be limited in its ability to reveal the self to the world. Therefore, when a body—living or dead—is presented for viewing, what one consequently sees is a limited
presentation of the person’s real self. In this way Donne begins to depreciate the value of
the physical and to privilege the value of the ideational.

The physical exists only to codify the nonphysical. Donne writes, “O my God, I
presse thee not, with thine owne text, without thine owne comment; I know that in the
state of my body, which is more discernible, than that of my soule, thou dost effigiate my
Soule to me” (Expostulation 22; 119). The body is an effigy for the soul. It is not a
presentation of the real self but a representation, a sign. In short, the parts of his body
become signs of Donne to Donne, a representation of his being and not its primary locus.
As a sign, the body is to be viewed, interpreted, and read not for what it can reveal about
itself but for what it can reveal about something that lies beyond it. What lies beyond the
body in this case is an apprehending agent that can actively engage in the process of
reading the body in order to apply what is read to itself. According to Donne, this
reflection marks the genuine self, the self that can stand beyond physical deterioration:
“But if my soule were no more than the soule of a beast, I could not thinke so; that soule
that can reflect upon it selfe, consider it selfe, is more than so” (Meditation 18; 91).

As the soul’s effigy, the body can give its viewers an analogical but incomplete
knowledge of the soul. It can never display the core of Donne’s self that suffers under the
condition of original sin. The only thing that can display this core is language, especially
the language of God, who discerns all things. It follows that for Donne, information about
Donne’s real self comes only from the inscribed language that makes up the pages of
Scripture. Elsewhere in the Devotions Donne reiterated this dependence on God’s written
language for self-knowledge: “O God of all light, I know thou knowest all; and it is Thou,
that declarest unto man, what is his Heart. Without thee, O Soveraigne goodnesse, I could not know, how ill my heart were. [. . .] And I can gather out of thy Word, so good testimony of the hearts of men, as to finde single hearts, docile, and apprehensive hearts [. . .]; such hearts I can find in thy Word” (Expostulation 11; 58-59).

If God’s nature is logocentric, and if Donne finds his own nature revealed in the set of propositions sanctioned by canonization as divine truth (i.e., the bible), then he has a warrant to imitate God by creating a text. Such a text may serve not only as an expression of Donne’s nonphysical agency and intention and also as a substitute corpus in lieu of Donne’s degenerating body. That Donne’s writing seeks to copy a quasi-materiality that mimics Donne’s temporal body has been critically established. His description of the humoral vapor that courses through his body also shares in the material dynamic, suggesting that “the rhetorical pattern of the station [Expostulation 12] is designed to recreate the refining transmutation of bodily spirits as they were theorized by Galenic medicine, making the text itself an instance or image of the body” (Kuchar 171). In his fragmented, ejaculatory phrasings, Donne figures the breaking apart of the natural body (Partridge 201, 208). In his title page to the first edition of the Devotions, Donne writes that the individual devotions are “[d]igested into” three sections—the meditation, the expostulation, and the prayer. Of this verb Selleck claims, “That language is no accident: ‘digestion’ is a crucial metaphor for this text, which not only recounts in detail his body’s daily condition and its (humoral) medical treatment, but in its repetitive structure [. . .] also keeps reenacting a kind of digestive process” (164). Moreover, in his discussion of the heart, Donne uses the word I rhythmically, as if imitating the pulse of a heart (Webber
In moving his core self from a decayed body into a pseudo-corporeal scripture, Donne finds a permanent locale from which his existence could be (in his eyes) properly figured via a balance between its material component (the bodily register) and the nonmaterial one (the semantic meaning). In that Donne seeks to position that text in God, this textual configuring is a strategy to achieve permanence of self. An important part of this interpolation is a petition designed to secure God as an audience to Donne’s texts. In one of his sermons, Donne affirms that

> all comes from Gods hand; and from his hand, by way of handwriting, by way of letter, and instruction to us. And therefore to ascribe things wholly to nature, to fortune, to power, to second causes, this is to mistake the hand, not to know Gods hand; [. . .] I will take knowledge that it is Gods hand to me, and I will study the will of God to me in that letter; and I will write back again to my God and return him an answer, in the amendment of my life. (Donne, *Sermons* 8:305-06)

In this passage Donne highlights two things: first, that the reading of external things can be a misreading, and second, that one’s life can be figured in writing. When God is the reader, however, the reading of the text of the inner man can never miscommunicate because God is infallible and omniscient. As a result, the most nearly complete revelation of the core self takes place in the form of a book addressed to God. Once God reads the book, his never-failing memory will ensure that the content of the book remains scripted forever as a system of propositions on the pages of God’s mind. If Donne is in the text and if God reads the text, then Donne as a self would achieve an immutable permanence.
In light of these conclusions, it is interesting to note that over two-thirds of the Devotions (every expostulation and prayer) is addressed specifically to God.

Once the text is addressed to God, the final part of the positioning process can follow: a blurring of the boundaries between Donne’s inscripted self and God’s essence. Donne’s articulation of this blurring is striking. Sometimes the ground for the union is the spirit of God. To God Donne says, “[H]eare thy Spirit saying in my Soule, Heale mee, O Lord, for I would bee healed” (Prayer 4; 23). Donne envisions the Holy Spirit uttering the first-person mee and I, yet these pronouns clearly also refer to Donne. Most times, however, Donne joins with God by joining himself with Christ, who is a mediator between Donne and God the Father by virtue of Christ’s work on the cross, and also a plenary replication of God’s self by virtue of the doctrine of the Trinity.\footnote{Donne’s identifying Christ with God is seen clearly in the opening of Expostulation 3: “My God, and my Jesus, my Lord, and my Christ, my Strength, and my Salvation, I heare thee, and I hearken to thee, when thou rebukest thy Disciples, for rebukiing them, who brought children to thee” (16). A clearer expression of Trinitarian standing is found in Donne’s opening line of his Expostulation 23: “My God, my God, my God, thou mightie Father, who hast bee my Physician, Thou glorious Sonne, who hast bee my physicke; Thou blessed Spirit, who hast prepared and applied all to mee” (122).} Donne highlights his bodily digestion of Christ via the eating of the communion bread (Expostulation 7; 39). He highlighted a bodily exchange between the two persons of Donne and Christ: “Even my spotts belong to thy Sonnes body, and are part of that, which he came down to this earth, to fetch, and challenge, and assume to himselfe. When I open my spotts, I doe but present him with that which is His” (Expostulation 13; 69-70).

In some ways Donne’s text identifies with Christ in its middle parts, illustrating again Donne’s eagerness to align his text with Christ, the full representation of God. The middle passages of the Devotions displays Donne’s suffering in his sickness. This section
of the book stands between Donne’s description of the oncoming sickness and the last part, where Donne describes the beginning of the remission. Consequently, the middle mediates Donne through the critical period. It is also where most of the imagery of Donne’s identifying with Christ is placed. Between these two ends, the expostulations, beginning with Expostulation 6 and carrying through to Expostulation 22, each start with “My God, my God” or a variant of the phrase. This address imitates verbatim the address Christ used in his prayer to God during his own suffering (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” [Matthew 27:46]). Furthermore, as Christ in his death had advocated the Christian’s forgiveness before God the Father, the expostulations similarly advocate to God the justness of the preceding meditations. The debates of the expostulations are then settled in the proceeding prayers, and some sort of closure is reached, imitating the favorable judicial closure the mediation of Christ has brought about between Donne and God the Father.

If Donne identifies with Christ’s physical sufferings in the middle part of the Devotions, he joins ideationally with God toward the end of the treatise, when one might suppose the process of self-relocation away from the physical and into the mental would be nearing completion. An intriguing scenario is laid out in Expostulation 20. Donne says to God:

I was whipped by thy rod, before I came to consultation, to consider my state; and shall I go no farther? As hee that would describe a circle in paper, if hee have

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132 As shown in the preceding note, the last expostulation opens in an apparently similar way. However, the three-fold address makes it clear that in this expostulation Donne addresses the Trinity, wherein Christ himself is addressed. Donne is not figuring himself as Christ here, as I will argue he does in the preceding expostulations.
brought that circle within one inch of finishing, yet if he remove his compasse, he cannot make it up a perfit circle, except he fall to worke againe, to finde out the same center, so, though setting that foot of my compasse upon thee, I have gone so farre, as to the consideration of my selfe, yet if I depart from thee, my center, all is unperfitt. (107-08)

Donne can be seen here as a self inscribed on paper. In Expostulation 20 he is close—“within one inch”—to finishing the Devotions, the recording of God’s redeeming ways with Donne’s body. The center around which his inscription moves and from which it is anchored is a dot, a nondimensional, nonphysical entity definable only in terms of the abstract. Clearly, the centerpoint is God, and Donne is the circle. Yet in Donne’s opening devotion, he addresses God by writing, “O eternall, and most gracious God, who considered in thy selfe, art a Circle, first and last, and altogether” (Prayer 1; 9). As God is a circle, Donne had begun to view himself as a circle, a symbol of eternity, definable only in abstraction. And inasmuch as in this analogy God is a point, part of Donne is being firmly anchored in that point. The connection between a circle and its centerpoint is a permanent one and an analytic one, since if a circle is defined as a line, the collected points of which are all equidistant from a single point outside the line, then no circle can be drawn that, once drawn, does not reveal the exact location of the central dot or point. As a necessary part of the drawn circle, this point is nevertheless not penciled in if one’s purpose is to draw a circle: the compass (in Donne’s case, the pen he used to write the Devotions) leaves the centerpoint blank. But it is there, grounding the circle, just as God exists invisible to the physical world yet grounding it nonetheless, and just as Donne
postulates a personal existence invisible to his body but grounding it (the body) nonetheless. In his book Donne attempts to write himself as a circle anchored to an impenetrable, indivisible point. This inscription gives rise “to such a participation of thy selfe” which “cannot bee parted” (Prayer 23; 126). Like a point, God cannot be parted, but he can be participated in if he is used as a foundation for one’s understanding of the eternal nature of the redeemed self.

**Conclusion**

As he lay on the bed of his sickness during that winter of 1623, Donne feared that his soul would die with the body, even if for only a temporary period. At its heart, this fear is a fear of a loss of identity. As Kuchar puts it one way: “It is thus not the purely physical dissolution of the body that Donne fears most, but the loss of the symbolic function the body performs in the constitution of identity,” and thus “when Donne imagines his corpse, he sees not merely a dead body but a crisis in the power of naming” (175). To counter this crisis Donne turns to writing, to creating words. Equating life with breath and breath with speech, Donne points out that one’s speech is a sign that God is working to redeem the soul (Donne, *Sermons* 4.252). He struggles with fear of annihilation, and he admits that “feare is a stifling spirit, a spirit of suffocation” (Expostulation 6; 30). If one is afraid, one will not speak; to speak, then, is not to be afraid. During his encounter with death, Donne imitates the copiousness of the creative of the Divine Speaker who is Donne’s God, and he speaks voluminously, He writes the *Devotions*. In it, Donne translates his physical body into a logocentric one, inscribes it in the eternal present, and,
in having God as his principle reader, embeds the texted self into the memory of God. Held in the mind of God, Donne’s self can never “perish on the shore” as he feared it would in “A Hymn to God the Father.” Instead, it is “done”: Donne is done, finished, complete in the sense that the perfect circle is *perfectus* (from *facere*)—a completed circle.

Eight days before his actual death in 1631, Donne wrote “Hymne to God My God, in My Sickness.” The first stanza is a famous one:

> Since I am comming to that Holy roome,
> Where, with thy Quire of Saints for evermore,
> I shall be made thy Musique; As I come
> I tune the Instrument here at the dore
> and what I must doe then, thinke here before.  (lines 1-5)

The image seems straightforward enough: Donne will sing God’s praises with the choir of the saints in heaven, so he wants to set his mind on the task now, as he stands at the door leading from this world to the next. One may, however, extend this reading. Donne writes that he will “thinke here before” what “I must doe then.” What Donne is thinking about “here before” when he pens the poem are the lines of verse themselves. And because of the lines’ present tense, when Donne writes that “I tune the Instrument here,” he reveals that the tuning process is the writing process. His “Musique,” then, would be his musings, his contemplations, his poetry. More importantly, as the text makes clear, the music here is God’s music (“thy Musique”). Appealing to the well-known etymology of the word *music*, I want to suggest that this word can be taken as referring to God’s
musings, or his stable, propositional thoughts. The “Quire of Saints” is a singing choir, no doubt. But Donne would also have associated the word *quire* with a gathering of pages. This sort of quire could be “a small book or pamphlet, [especially] one consisting of a set of four sheets of parchment or paper folded in two so as to form eight leaves,” or “a short poem, treatise, etc., which is or could be contained in such a book,” or even “any book (containing literary work)” (*OED*). Donne would have been familiar with all these meaning not only because of his familiarity with literary things but also because of the fluid spelling of his day. The seventeenth-century *Book of Common Prayer* consistently spelled *choir* as *quire*, and it also contained this colophon: “The Imprinter to sell this Booke in Queres for two shillynges and sixe pence” (*OED*). Donne knew this little book well, for he used it in his services at St. Pauls. With both meanings of the word *quire* at play, Donne might have been thinking about not just practicing his singing for God’s glory but practicing his word-making. After all, he was about to enter God’s book in the same manner that he believed every saint before him passing through the door had entered: as an eternal word.
Johnson Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*, Eternal Death, and the Assurance of the Elect Community’s Approving Gaze

Donne sought to counter the demise of his body by figuring the self into a book and positioning the book into the immortal mind of God. In using his imagination not only to visualize his body’s various states of decay but also to construe a process of immortalization that rendered these states as only temporary, he employed the gaze of an inner eye. Moreover, in publishing his account, Donne created a metaphoric child that would maintain his voice beyond the tomb. Perhaps Bunyan cannot match Donne in rhetorical flourishes and scholastic wit, but, in the end, he displays a more nearly complete grasp on multiple defense techniques against death than does Donne. Like Donne, Bunyan uses an inner eye to create a remove between his speculating self and the “real-world” self living in recorded history, and he uses the technique of birthing a child via print to ensure the perpetuation of his voice. But moving beyond these activities, Bunyan depends upon a community of spectators to issue a collective, external voice that attests to Bunyan’s possession of eternal life. Bunyan asks this community not to observe the man Bunyan, who lives and moves outside the books he writes, but instead to scrutinize the figurized Bunyan present in the text itself. In this way, the text serves as a

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133 In his dedication of the book to Prince Charles, Donne makes the point that “This Child of mine, this Booke, comes into the world, from mee, and with mee” (3).
locus of health for the inner Bunyan who is displayed within its pages, and, as the child of the author Bunyan, it testifies indirectly to the ultimate health of the actual Bunyan.

**Bunyan and the Second Death**

Puritan theology of seventeenth-century England held that one could die two deaths. Obviously, the body dies a physical death by means of a vast variety of causes. After this comes the question of the soul’s possible death. This question is not one of whether or not the soul would live somewhere forever, for the eternal life of the soul was taken to be a common denominator for all humans. Rather, the question was of *where* the soul would spend eternity. If the soul spends eternity in Christ, united with God, then orthodox Christian theology held that the soul enjoys that phenomenon curiously described by Paul as “the life that is truly life.”

If the soul spends eternity outside Christ, separated from God, then it is believed to have undergone a profound, permanent death known as “the Second Death.”

Although the exact nature of the Second Death was hardly agreed upon by common consensus of the Catholic, Anglican, Puritan, and sectarian branches, almost all spiritual leaders in England would have known the biblical text from which this frightful state derives its name. The last book of the New Testament records Christ’s words spoken to John in his vision while exiled on the island of Patmos: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, the unbelieving,

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134 Paul writes to Timothy, the pastor of a fledgling church in Ephesus, to tell him to encourage his congregation “to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Cor. 18-19, New International Version).
and the abominable, the murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:7-8).

Even a cursory reading of John Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), will show that Bunyan feared the Second Death. Various passages depict him struggling to believe that God could forgive someone like him, and this unbelief leads him to fear the judgment that would come upon him were he to die without this forgiveness. His habitual doubting along with the fear it produces, when compared with the damnable qualities listed in the Revelation passage, seems to place Bunyan readily among the group of people who can expect eternal death.

The beginning of the narrative specifically highlights physical death. Bunyan’s near-death experiences involve the Bedford River, the adder, and the musket ball, as well as his fear that the bell tower might fall on him (8, 13-14). But Bunyan sketches physical death in these cases as the gateway to God’s final judgment, which he fears will cast him into hell. By the end of the narrative, this Second Death receives explicit emphasis. During the low points of incarceration, Bunyan reveals, “I had also another consideration, and that was, The dread of the torments of Hell, which I was sure they must partake of, that for fear of the Cross do shrink from their profession of Christ, his Word and Laws, before the sons of men” (90). Fearing that he might be executed, Bunyan writes,

Satan laid hard at me to beat me out of heart, by suggesting thus unto me: But how if when you come indeed to die, you should be in this condition; that is, as not to savour the things of God, not to have any evidence upon your soul for a
better state hereafter [. . .]. Wherefore when I at first began to think of this, it was a great trouble to me: for I thought with my self, that in the condition I now was in, I was not fit to die. (91)

The doubts continue: “still the tempter followed me with, But whither must you go when you die? what will become of you? where will you be found in another world? what evidence have you for heaven and glory, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified? Thus was I tossed for manie weeks, and knew not what to do” (92).  

In this chapter I will argue that Bunyan counters his fears of the Second Death by writing *Grace Abounding*, which captures in words a positive interpretation of Bunyan’s experience. The text itself is displaced from Bunyan’s body, the locus of his contention, and the materiality of the displaced text allows others to view it not just as a representation of Bunyan’s experiences but as an object involved in a parent/offspring relationship with Bunyan its maker. Furthermore, the text showcases a regenerative process, which, because the text promises to be a representation of Bunyan’s body, can be seen as occurring in Bunyan himself. The book encourages its readership to form an external communal recognition of Bunyan’s salvation (i.e., salvation from death), an outside evaluation that serves to settle Bunyan’s fear. In this way, Bunyan comes to depend upon a community for assurance of his own election unto salvation.

**Bunyan the Calvinist’s Perpetual Doubt**

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135 The only critic I have seen who even obliquely mentions a fear of death standing behind Bunyan’s other fears is Vera Camden, who interprets Bunyan’s repetitiveness in light of Freud’s view on the death instinct (“*That of Esau*” 152-53).
Bunyan’s fear of the Second Death manifests itself primarily as a fear of damnation of the Calvinistic ilk, or the state of being forever barred from heaven by virtue of God’s eternal divine fiat. This fear springs from a major corollary of orthodox Calvinistic theology taken to its logical limits, that is, the idea of double predestination, or the belief that God chooses some people to be brought eventually to heaven and chooses all others to be sent to hell.

That Bunyan was a strict Calvinist holding to double predestination has been established by a number of writers. Many of these writers, however, have provided only a cursory examination, if any at all, of the way the notion of God’s absolute sovereignty is mutually exclusive with a person’s incorrigible reckoning of his or her own salvation. To my knowledge, only one writer has parsed this point. In his *The Persecutory Imagination*, John Stachniewski notes that if nothing “could coerce, alter, aid, or hinder God’s purposes” (19), then the commonly observed experience of a zealous neophyte’s falling away from grace and back into sin must be defined not as an instance of one person’s thwarting of God’s plans but as an instance of someone’s experiencing a taste of grace that was designed from the start to recede and desist. Thus, people “who, after living amongst the faithful with every appearance of being saved, deserted the faith or grew lax had been the recipient not of saving grace but of ‘common’ or ‘temporary

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136 By the time Bunyan wrote *Grace Abounding*, mainstream Calvinism was on the wane in England (Baker 127, 30-31). Yet middling pockets of full-fledged Calvinism existed in England well into the 1700s.

137 See Greaves 51-64; Sharrock, “Spiritual” 103-4; Stachniewski 128; and Haskin 66. This list hardly covers the critics who have rightly pegged Bunyan as a Calvinist. For a detailed study on Bunyan’s theology, see Michael Davies’s “A Comfortable Doctrine: John Bunyan’s Theology of Grace,” chapter one in his *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan*. It is to be noted, however, that in his analyses Davies mitigates Bunyan’s Calvinism, claiming that “[t]his study of Bunyan provides a revisionist account of Bunyan’s faith” and that “the fundamental tenets of Bunyan’s soteriology will undergo a detailed re-evaluation” (5).
faith”” (19).\textsuperscript{138} Since at the first, common grace seems so very much like saving face, the conclusion is, “Anyone’s faith might be common or temporary or […] an unconscious pretence” (20). Again, one’s own desires had nothing to do with God’s eternal plan—“Calvin was coolly conscious that very few would be saved and it was clear to him that the damned would be partly composed of those who wanted to be or at some point thought they were saved” (20-21). So although one might earnestly desire salvation and even experience the sentiments, insights, and releases from sin that accompany genuine conversion, only time could tell whether those sentiments, insights, and releases were genuine. And even one’s longtime persistence in these signs was but a shaky comfort, for if it was God’s purpose to damn a soul, no amount of correct surface signage could thwart this purpose. In theory, then, a person could be the exemplar of holiness up to the moment of death and then lose all in his or her hidden but eternally arranged damnation, if God so willed.

It is easy to see to what a conundrum these tenets would lead for earnest, introspective souls. Yet these troubling waters are to be further stirred. Stachniewski points out that in his writings “Calvin ignores the anxieties he is creating” and that “he even asserts that to experience such anxieties may be a sign of reprobation” (20). Calvin’s exposition of possible assurances one may enjoy is nonchalant: “If Pighius asks me how I know I am elect,” he writes, “I answer that Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me” (qtd. in Stachniewski 20). What sort of answer is this? Does this mean that Christ advocates on Calvin’s behalf before God the Father? But how does Calvin

\textsuperscript{138} Stachniewski references Calvin’s \textit{Institutes} (trans. T. Norton, 1561) 3.2.10-12 and 3.24.8.
know that Christ actually does mediate for him? Does this answer mean that Calvin’s own understanding of Christ’s efficacious work on the cross cancels any deficiency of graceful signs in a would-be believer’s life? How could it mean this when Calvin’s notion of common grace meant that those eventually doomed to perpetual death in Hell also understood the notion of Christ’s propitiation? Finally, if Calvin means by his answer that he knows he is elect simply because he does not at this moment doubt that he is elect, then the answer’s tautology is obvious, as is its utter inability to comfort anyone who at this moment is seriously doubting his or her salvation. Calvin’s answer is an appeal to experiential evidence, but when incorporated into a scenario that includes an absolutely sovereign God who can use experiential evidence to deceive someone into thinking that he or she is elect, it is in fact a form of begging the question. Stachniewski is right when he concludes that this sort of evidence is “ambiguous” and that this sort of proof “cannot have been easy” to come by (21).

I do not believe that Bunyan shared Calvin’s nonchalant confidence. At least in most of his narrative representations of himself in *Grace Abounding*, the emphasis is on Bunyan’s anxiety over salvation, not his eventual assurance of it: “For Bunyan, conversion is not a point in time but a process which took years: he protracts the ‘conversion’ stage of his autobiography into two-thirds of his text [. . .], narratively prolonging, in effect, his terror over election” (Camden, “Most Fit” 819-20). From the start of the autobiography, this emphasis is clear, as one would expect it to be. As a child, Bunyan struggles with terrible dreams that left him “fearing that it would be my lot to be found at last amongst those Devils and Hellish Fiends, who are there bound down with
the chains and bonds of eternal darkness” (7). And even as a child, Bunyan was busy trying to invent a defense against this his imagined destiny: “I was so overcome with despair of life and heaven, that then I should often wish, either that there had been no Hell, or that I had been a Devil; supposing they were onely tormentors; that if it must needs be, that I indeed went thither, I might be rather a tormentor, then tormented my self” (7). Bunyan does pass through a subsequent period of relative ease, in which he “let loose the reins to my lusts, and delighted in all transgression against the Law of God” (7), but shortly after, during the famous episode of his game at Cat, he received a word from heaven that in an instant convinced him

That I had been a great and grievous Sinner, and that it was now too late for me to look after Heaven, for Christ would not forgive me, nor pardon my transgressions. Then I fell to musing upon this also; and while I was thinking on it, and fearing lest it should be so, I felt my heart sink in despair, concluding it was too late; and therefore I resolved in my mind, I would go on in sin: for thought I, if the case be thus, my state is surely miserable; miserable, if I leave my sins; and but miserable, if I follow them: I can but be damned; and if it must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins, as to be damned for few. (11)

From this point, Bunyan engages in a frenetic introspection to discover once and for all his spiritual status as either elect or reprobate.

As Bunyan inches closer and closer to what he will eventually consider to be a true standing in election, the psychological calculus displayed in the above excerpt persists in its ability to frustrate the process, rendering the narrated experience exhausting even for
the reader. The defining moment when Bunyan finds rest concerning his conversion is an issue of debate among students of *Grace Abounding*, one that I do not wish to enter here as it is somewhat beside my purpose of examining not when, but how, his rest is achieved. It is reasonable to assume that by the time Bunyan finished *Grace Abounding*, he would have thought that he had written down the experience of his conversion somewhere in the pages preceding the ending admonitions of the book. Consequently, if Bunyan so earnestly sought this conversion, thinking it would dissipate his despair over the possibility of his eternal damnation, one might think that after the conversion the despair and doubting would have gone away, and thus the end of *Grace Abounding* would be different from the rest of the narrative in that it is positioned after this moment of conversion. Yet the end shows the persistence of this doubt and despair. Bunyan tells his reader that even “after I had been about five or six years awakened, and helped to see both the want and worth of Jesus Christ our Lord” (75), sometimes “when I have been preaching, I have bin violently assaulted with thoughts of blasphemy, and strongly tempted to speak them with my mouth before the Congregation” (82) and that at times when

I have been about to preach upon some smart and scorching portion of the *Word*, I have found the tempter suggest, What! will you preach this? this condemns your self; of this your own Soul is guilty; wherefore preach not of it at all, or if you do, yet so mince it as to make way for your own escape, lest instead of awakening others, you lay that guilt upon your own soul, as you will never get from under (82).
His last paragraphs of the autobiography take this possibility of final condemnation to a deeper level. They show that Bunyan feared he would deny Christ while in jail and thus “falsifie my profession,” bringing upon himself Christ’s curse against Judas (90).\(^{139}\)

Closing his work, he proffers a startling admission:

I find to this day seven abominations in my heart: 1. Inclinings to unbelief, 2. Suddenlie to forget the love and mercie that Christ manifest, 3. A leaning to the Works of the Law, 4. Wandrings and coldness in prayer, 5. To forget to watch for that I pray for, 6. apt to murmur because I have no more, and yet readie to abuse what I have, 7. I can do none of those things which God commands me, but my corruptions will thrust in themselves; When I would do good, evil is present with me. (93-4)

The result of all this is that “though God doth visit my Soul with never so blessed a discoverie of himself, yet I have found again, that such hours have attended me afterwards, that I have been in my spirit so filled with darkness, that I could not so much as once conceive what that God and that comfort was with which I have been refreshed” (93). All this wavering shows that Bunyan’s level of confidence in his election

\(^{139}\) That is, Christ’s curse as rendered by King David, who penned the psalm Bunyan cites in his text. The passage is Psalm 109: 6-8 (actually, Bunyan’s citation is “Psal. 109. 6, 7, 8, &c.”), but Bunyan does not include the text in his book. It would have been illuminating had he done so. These verses read, “Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayers become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office.” Verses 9 and 10 are, “Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.” This curse removes all hope of Christ’s mediation, a fear Bunyan battled earlier on in the narrative, and it is interesting to read verses 9 and 10 in light of Bunyan’s own predicament while in jail. It may have seen to him that the literal fulfillment of the curse could come true at any moment, as at least once he thought of himself as “a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his Wife and Children” (90). Contrast this to Psalm 37: 25, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” If Bunyan’s children were to come to the state of begging, this would be a sort of proof that Bunyan himself was not righteous.
continually and radically fluctuated throughout most, if not all, of his life.\textsuperscript{140} Surely he found little comfort in Calvin’s claim that the truly saved will be constantly confident of their salvation.

\textbf{Bunyan’s Solution, Part One: Creating the Healing Voice}

The writing of \textit{Grace Abounding} allows Bunyan to craft a stable interpretation of his experience that attests to his sanctification. A person’s perspective of the world and of his or her experiences in the world become a kind of evidence as to whether that person was damned or not. Stachniewski shows that “since [Calvinistic] grace was supposed to arrive

\textsuperscript{140} I say most of his life because although Bunyan wrote \textit{Grace Abounding} in 1666, he published an enlarged fifth edition in 1680, leaving these passages in the text (see Stachniewski’s introduction to \textit{Grace Abounding}, p. liii). Therefore, I conclude that these testimonies of the continual fear still obtained in 1680. Furthermore, the passage in \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} depicting Christian’s crossing of the river surrounding the Celestial City is indicative of a persistent fear of reprobation. Midway through the river, \textit{Christian} began to sink, and crying out to his good friend \textit{Hopeful}; he said, I sink in deep Waters, the Billows go over my head, all his Waves go over me, \textit{Selah}.

Then said the other, Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good. Then said \textit{Christian}, Ah my friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about, I shall not see the Land that flows with Milk and Honey. And with that, a great darkness and horror fell upon \textit{Christian}, so that he could not see before him; also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his Pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake, still tended to discover that he had horror of mind, and hearty fears that he should die in that River, and never obtain entrance in the Gate: Here also, as they that stood by, perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a Pilgrim. ’Twas also observed, that he was troubled with apparitions of Hobgoblins and Evil Spirits, For ever and anon he would intimate so much by his words. (157)

With the encouragement of Hopeful, Christian finally does make it over to be welcomed into the city. But that fact that in the text Christian comes this close to the Celestial City and yet experiences this profound despair must have been somewhat disheartening to those readers who saw the text as a prescriptive overview of one’s own spiritual journey. Other troubling characters are Talkative, who can perfectly articulate the notions of saving grace yet not experience it (\textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} 75-85; see also Luxon’s analysis of Talkative’s false standing in Luxon’s “The Pilgrim’s Passive Progress” 74-6) and Ignorance, who lives a strict life and manages to make it all the way to the very gate of the Celestial City only to be bound and thrust into Hell (162-3). It is interesting that Bunyan decides to end \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} right on this note, the penultimate sentence being, “Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of \textit{Destruction},” and the last, “So I awoke, and behold it was a Dream” (163).
with irresistible force, uncertainty as to whether one was an authentic recipient had alarming implications” and that “a diffident assessment of your spiritual prospects was probably an accurate one” (20). The right perspective, according to Calvin, necessarily brought about confidence and hope:

And that [assuredness of election] can not be, but that we muste needes truly feele and prove in our selves the sweetenesse thereof. And therefore the Apostle out of fayth deriveth assured confidence, and out of it agayne boldenesse . . . Which boldnesse procedeth not but of assured confidence of Gods good will and our salvation. (Calvin qtd. in Stachniewski 22)

Although *Grace Abounding* does reveal Bunyan’s wavering between perspectives, it captures enough of Bunyan’s grace-filled moments that it becomes a stable memory bank for Bunyan to resort to in times of doubt. In a very real way, when he writes his book, Bunyan creates a mechanism that speaks encouraging words in his own voice when he himself might be unable to voice these hopes. When one is profoundly depressed (as one might become when convinced, for the moment at least, of his or her own damnation), one embraces a hermeneutic of solipsistic superlatives. This is to say, a genuinely depressed person may be eminently rational in understanding how some other person can have a different, ameliorative take on the issue at hand, yet can still remain

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141 Focusing on the possibility that in writing *Grace Abounding* Bunyan was experimenting with a textual space wherein he could explore disobedience, Nussbaum suggests that *Grace Abounding* “may be an attempt to establish an idealist truth about the self and as such is an authority which the narrator and protagonist create as a substitute for another charismatic authority in the act of disobedient dependence” (32). I question Nussbaum’s conclusions about disobedience but agree fully with her notion of the text as a created substitute authority. Camden comes closer to what I am arguing. In her “Blasphemy and the Problem of the Self in *Grace Abounding,*” she points out that “[t]hrough the doctrine of Christian election he will come to believe that he is numbered among the saints [. . .]. In the secure moments of his pilgrimage this knowledge comforts and exalts him. The task of autobiography is to make this assurance an unceasing, confident reality through the language of belief” (18).
convinced that this other person’s interpretation does not apply to himself in this case.

This depressed person views himself as always the exception to the general rule of hope the other person is proffering—“Yes,” one says, “I see what you are saying. I see that God can forgive the sins of even the worst sinner, but you do not understand what I know, and that is that God has simply decided to shut me out. I know this because I am privy to my inner state of damnation and you are not.” What this depressed person needs is a voice that is his own voice and yet is an outside voice: Bunyan’s autobiography provides just this same-yet-other voice for Bunyan.

There are some textual peculiarities that suggest Bunyan is carefully designing his narrative self to reflect well upon the real-life Bunyan. One way this fashioning takes place is through Bunyan’s manipulation of biblical texts in order to draw up a version of his experiences, and thus a version of himself, that is parallel to biblical models of successful sanctification. For instance, Bunyan makes much of the similarities he sees between himself and Esau, the brother of Jacob, the patriarch of the twelve Old Testament tribes of Israel. In the Old Testament passage, Esau returns from hunting famished and offers his birthright to his brother in return for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25:29-34). But the specific Esau passage that Bunyan uses is the New Testament passage that refers to the Old Testament event, and he takes this New Testament passage out of context. In the New Testament, the Esau reference by the writer of Hebrews is placed directly next to an injunction against adultery:

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142 This point has been made before, by Haskins 72, Nussbaum 21, and Bottrall 108-9, among others. To my knowledge, thought, no one has brought up the doctoring of the Esau passage or the particular way Bunyan words his selling of Christ as a hypothetical instead of a categorical, points I will discuss in this paragraph.
Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Heb. 12:14-16)

Esau is directly identified with the profane person here, but the phrase *profane person* can be viewed as an appositive to the noun *fornicator*. Although Esau’s sin of selling the birthright is frequently expounded upon in *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan is consistently silent about the possibility that sexual misdoing is also at play in the original Esau passage. Perhaps this was because, as the ending of his autobiography makes clear, Bunyan himself was facing accusations of sexual looseness. To touch upon this part of the Esau figure might be to give his detractors a fresh load of ammunition.

Bunyan further manipulates Scripture when he fashions his selling of Christ to be conditional. The notion of an unpardonable sin comes from Mark’s gospel. As Jesus confronts the Jewish leaders who have been opposing him, he says, “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin” (Mark 3: 28-29). One way to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is simply to utter blasphemous words,

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143 In this vein one wonders why Bunyan twice compares himself to Sampson (3, 82). Although Sampson did receive a firm commendation for his faith (see Hebrews 11:32), his major downfall was sexually liaisons with non-Israelite women.
either out loud or in one’s heart. The power inherent in this act—the ability to push away the Holy Spirit forever with a few simple words—must have been exceedingly tempting to Bunyan, who for much of his youth had tried to feign a power and authority in his curse-laden speech. For quite some time, Bunyan struggled with the thought of actually selling Christ, i.e., blaspheming against him. He fashions the experience of being tempted as something outside his control:

But it was neither my dislike of the thought, nor yet any desire and endeavour to resist it, that in the least did shake or abate the continuation or force and strength thereof; for it did always in almost whatever I thought, intermix it self therewith, in such sort that I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that. Sometimes it would run in my thoughts not so little as a hundred times together, Sell him, sell him, sell him; against which, I may say, for whole hours together I have been forced to stand as continually leaning and forcing my spirit against it, lest haply before I were aware, some wicked thought might arise in my heart that might consent thereto. (39)

When Bunyan finally does give in, it is as if the blasphemous thought sneaks up and captures him: “but at last,” Bunyan says, “after much strving, even until I was almost out of breath, I felt this thought pass through my heart, Let him go if he will! And I thought also that I felt my heart consent thereto” (40).

The distress that Bunyan experiences after this episode is proof that he really in that moment thought he had committed the unpardonable sin, but surely the textual rendition
of the selling casts a shade of doubt over Bunyan’s intent and commitment to the act. Bunyan *feels* a thought go through his heart, and he *thinks* that he *feels* his heart reject Christ. A paraphrase of his confession of denying Christ might be, “Oh! What was that? I’m not sure, but I guess I just sold Christ with that feeling.” Furthermore, the propositional version of this vague feeling is the conditional statement “Let him go if he will.” The scribes that condemned Christ for healing accused him declaratively to be of Beelzebub—“And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He *hath* Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils” (Mark 3:22, italics mine). The conditional *if* lets Bunyan rest the final effect of his sin on Christ, for it is now up to Christ to stay or go. Of course, Bunyan will eventually be able to say that because of Christ’s great mercy, he (Christ) has decided not to leave Bunyan.

This construction of his major sin reflects well on Bunyan. In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan repeatedly pens the words of the temptation. For example, at one point he writes that he was lying in his bed with “the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, *sell him, sell him, sell him, sell him*, as fast as a man could speak” (40). In that the narrative is removed from the actual lived experience because it is a record of the event, not the event itself, this repetition becomes an innocuous instance of re-selling Christ. That is, in repeatedly writing down both the temptation and his response to it, Bunyan shows his audience that he has reached a stage where he can handle these utterances without any real spiritual damage, not to experiment with them\(^{144}\) but to make a point about his present status as one of the elect. Paul, when he was shipwrecked off the coast of Melita,

\(^{144}\) See Nussbaum 19-20.
was bitten by a viper as he helped gather wood to make a fire.

When the people of the island saw the *venemous* beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. (Acts 28:2-6)

I suggest that while Bunyan may not have had this passage in mind as he writes and re-writes his own damning words, the response of the audience sketched in the Pauline passage is one he may expect his own readership to provide: when observers see someone handle death and come away unscathed, they ascribe a sort of power over death to this person. Bunyan wants his audience to ascribe to him this power. He wants them to view him as one of the elect.

**Bunyan’s Solution, Part Two: Giving the Voice the Body of a “Son”**

Bunyan objectifies this sympathetic version of himself by writing and publishing the actual book *Grace Abounding*. This alter ego is othered to the extent that it could begin to take on an identity and a materiality rivaling that of Bunyan’s physical body. Spiritual autobiography is an exteriorizing of an interior space. Done within a Calvinistic frame, this writing presents its audience with a frozen constellation of signs because once a particular, printed version of a narrative is written, any new signs of election or
damnation the author may experience cannot be interjected into the narrative without the emergence of a new text. Moreover, spiritual autobiography as a writing style implicitly promises its audience that its interpretation of these signs is the correct one, a promise anchored in the notion that the self (as author) is giving honest testimony of his or her inner state at the time the exterior signs were playing on the surface of the body. Thus, spiritual autobiography promises to be a true cross-section of the body, including its exterior and interior spaces.

In Bunyan’s case, his autobiography goes beyond a printed testimony. The physical nature of the encounters with Scripture and the wrestlings with temptation described in *Grace Abounding* give the text solidity and an agency of its own. From the beginning, Scripture “darts” upon Bunyan, proceeds “to trample upon” his desires, to “fall with weight” upon his spirit, to “come with strength” upon him, to seize him, run through him, take hold of him.  

The presence of this invading word can be so vivid that Bunyan actually thinks someone is calling after him (28-29). At one point the collision between the Scripture and Bunyan is so strong that Bunyan says “Scripture also did tear

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145 See *Grace Abounding* 10, 20, 21, 40. Although this sort of physical elocution is present throughout the work, see also 31, 33-35, 48, 54-55, 58-59, 65, 70, and 73.

146 The colloquial style in which Bunyan relates this incident merits a full quotation. Notice also the strange doubleness that Bunyan overlays upon the experience and the way he begins to erase the borders between the interior and exterior spaces from where he believes the call to emanate:

Now about a week or fortnight after this, I was much followed by this Scripture, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, Luk. 22.31. and sometimes it would sound so loud within me, yea, and as it were call so strongly after me, that once above all the rest, I turned my head over my shoulder, thinking verily that some man had behind me called to me, being at a great distance. [M]e thought he called so loud, it came as I have thought since to have stirred me up to prayer and to watchfulness. It came to acquaint me that a cloud and storm was coming down upon me, but I understood it not. Also as I remember, that time as it called to me so loud, it was the last time that it sounded in mine ears, but methinks I hear still with what a loud voice these words Simon, Simon sounded in my ears. I thought verily, as I have told you, that some body had called after me that was half a mile behind me; and although that was not my name, yet it made me suddenly look behind me, believing that he that called so loud meant me. (28-29)
and rend my Soul” (31). The physicality of Bunyan’s renditions of his encounters with Scripture has been noted before. What I wish to point out here is that the physicality relayed by the text of Bunyan’s experiences with Scripture passages transfers to the very text itself that houses quotations of these passages, causing the narrative itself to become corporeal and kinetic.

These qualities, combined with the actual physical nature of the printed book, allow Bunyan’s autobiography to stand on its own in the same way a child stands ontologically independent of its father once it is birthed. Bunyan was keenly aware of this metaphoric parental relationship between the creating author and the created text. In the beginning of “The Author’s Apology” poem that introduces The Pilgrim’s Progress, he plays on the idea extensively. Referring to his solid “pen” that he sets to paper “with great delight” (line 29), Bunyan presents an extended image of insemination, conception, and birth. Bunyan’s thoughts stream onto the paper through his pen, coming at such a rate that “In more than twenty things, which I set down: / This done, I twenty more had in my Crown” (lines 11-12). These words are in fact interjected into the body of another text Bunyan is in the process of writing (lines 1-6). Bunyan, deciding to extract the growing fetus of words from the host text “lest you at last / Should prove ad infinitum, and eat out / The Book that I already am about” (lines 16-18), plays the part of the proud midwife showing off the infant she has just delivered: “Still as I pull’d, it came; and so I penn’d / It down,

147 See, for example, Sharrock, who highlights the kinesis of the text and the parallels between the quasi-physical encounters and the rhythm of Bunyan’s prose (6, 10-11); Brainerd P. Stranahan, who identifies biblical texts as events and describes the tangible nature of Bunyan’s ideas (329, 332-33); Camden, who investigates Bunyan’s yoking of language with body, words with materiality (“That of Esau” 140, 150, 156); and Peter Goldman, who argues that Bunyan portrays textual interpretation as a physical struggle (464).
until it came at last to be / For length and breadth the bigness which you see” (lines 31-33). Finally, when Bunyan shows his creation to others, “some said, let them live; some, let them die: / Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so” (lines 39-40). The equation of printing Bunyan’s words with letting them live suggests that life—and thus a figurative “sonship”—does not come to Bunyan’s newly born text until it is in print.

Just as Bunyan asks his readers, whom he views also as his children,¹⁴⁸ to expect to see similarities in their remembrances of their own struggles toward salvation and his,¹⁴⁹ so too does Bunyan expect his autobiography to carry a resemblance to its father, its author. Bunyan the man who is the father of Grace Abounding is ontologically prior to the text of Grace Abounding and is positioned as its cause. Given the logical assumption that inherent in the effect are qualities of the cause, Bunyan’s contemporary audience might readily have felt invited to ascribe the characteristics of the narrative version of Bunyan to Bunyan himself. Given their propensity to ascribe a high value to spiritual testimony and to thus expect such testimony to be true, they almost certainly did. In this way, the text ends up benefiting Bunyan because its testimony about him produces in his readership a communal perspective that views him as elect. As a communal perspective and not just Bunyan’s perspective, this view builds an external apparatus of approbation that the author can fall back upon were he to doubt his own voice, perhaps by entering

¹⁴⁸ That Bunyan thinks himself to be writing to his children is made abundantly clear in his preface, which he opens by writing, “Children, Grace be with you, Amen” (3). He patterns himself as his readers’ father three other times in the short introduction.
¹⁴⁹ Bunyan claims he writes in order to remember his “forty years travel in the wilderness,” saying, “this I have endeavoured to do; and not onely so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their Souls, by reading his work upon me” (4). He admonishes the reader, “If you have sinned against light, if you are tempted to blaspheme, if you are down in despair, if you think God fights against you, or if heaven is hid from your eyes; remember ’twas thus with your Father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me” (5).
another period of despair and doubt after 1680, when the last edition of *Grace Abounding* during Bunyan’s lifetime was published. Because of his tendencies to doubt, as described in the autobiography’s last paragraphs, the relapse of Bunyan the man was entirely possible.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the growing awareness in the later English Renaissance of a person’s status as a unique individual with a unique destiny fueled the imaginations of seventeenth-century Calvinists and the would-be elect, for if the remaining branches of predestinarian ideology in England were nucleated around anything, they converged on the notion of individuality. These versions of Calvinism all held that it was the individual alone that either wore the badge of election or shouldered the burden of reprobation.

The language of Early Modern spiritual autobiography bears out this attention to

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150 Margaret Bottrall hints towards this in her *Every Man a Phoenix*, 22-3. Michael Davies, in “Bunyan’s Exceeding Maze,” is more direct: “spiritual autobiography is now often seen as embodying what Roger Pooley and Stuart Sim, among others, call a ‘new sense of self,’ This new self-awareness marks the emergence of individuality into modern society, on the one hand, and an extremism of subjectivity on the other. The source of this growth in introspection is often located in the paradoxes of Calvinist theology” (100). Davies references Pooley’s “Grace Abounding and the New Sense of Self,” *John Bunyan and His England, 1628-88*, ed. Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens, and Stuart Sim (London: Hambledon, 1990), 105-14, and Sim’s *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 24.

151 In his *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories*, Leopold Damrosch Jr. points out that although “each sect or subgroup of Puritans [. . .] had a vivid sense of its own identity” and that “collectively they exhibited aggressive confidence,” in fact “the peculiarity of the tradition is that its tightly-knit groups were founded on a premise of absolute individuality, the nakedness of each soul before God” and that “considered individually, they exhibited anxiety and alienation” (18).
individualism. Echoing Paul’s admission to Timothy,\textsuperscript{152} certainly more than one anguished soul called themselves the “chief of sinners,” including Oliver Cromwell (Bottrall 102; Damrosch 129-30, 33). The appropriation of this title in this way implies that these people believed themselves to be positioned beyond others in isolation at the lowest point of depravity. At this nadir, the spiritual sufferer seems almost past being capable of receiving genuinely effective help from others—if God willed this person to be damned, then no amount of human argumentation and locution could change the person’s destiny.

In holding to this tune, Bunyan opens his most famous text, \textit{Pilgrim’s Progress}, with imagery that reinforces a personal framework of isolation. The narrator, who is soon to experience the dream about Christian and his travels, first situates himself in solitude: his dream comes to him as he “walk’d through the wilderness of this world” (8).\textsuperscript{153} This man lies in a den, sleeps, and dreams of “\textit{a Man cloathed with Raggs, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own House}” (8). At first this man in the dream is not completely willing to be separated from the community of his village and his family. Nevertheless, as his anxiety persists, the separation begins to materialize. His family, wanting to return him to his former self, thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriages to him: sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they

\textsuperscript{152} “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did \textit{it} ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This \textit{is} a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1: 12-15, Authorized Version of 1611).

\textsuperscript{153} All quotations from \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} are from Roger Sharrock’s revised and expanded edition (1960) of James Blanton Wharey’s original edition (1928), both of which were published by Oxford UP.
would quite neglect him: wherefore he began to retire himself to his Chamber to pray for, and pity them; and also to condole his own misery: he would also walk solitarily in the Fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying: and thus for some days he spent his time. (9)

Finally, after Evangelist visits this man and point out the way of escape, “the man began to run; Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the Plain” (10). At this point, the segregation of the salvation-seeking self from the complacent community is complete. And although this fleeing man has a few temporary companions and meets several genuine help-meets along the first part of the path he must follow, he is emphatically alone up to the point when he encounters the cross and, consequently, salvation. It is only after the cross that he has any true companions.154

About eighteen years before this passage in The Pilgrim’s Progress was written, Bunyan depicted the same seclusion unto one’s self in Grace Abounding. At the beginning of the narrative, an unconverted Bunyan claims that his great propensity to swear and curse sets himself apart from his peers:

I was standing at a Neighbours Shop-window, and there cursing and swearing, and playing the Mad-man after my wonted manner, there sate within the woman of the house, and heard me; who though she also was a very loose and ungodly

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154 This is my correction upon N. H. Keeble’s claim that “[i]n neither part of The Pilgrim’s Progress do pilgrims travel alone” (235). Perhaps Keeble does not consider the fleeing man a pilgrim until after the cross.
Wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate, that she was make to tremble to hear me: And told me further, *That I was the ungodliest Fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life; and that I by thus doing, was able to spoil all the Youth in a whole Town, if they came but in my company.* (12)

Soon after this, as he plies his tinker trade in Bedford, Bunyan overhears a group of women “talking about the things of God” (14). Bunyan’s narrative construction of himself as alien to this godly talk is implicit, interestingly projected away from himself and onto these people—“they [the women] were to me as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone” (14)—but his frustration at being left out of this communion is stated directly enough: “I was greatly affected with their words, both because by them I was convinced that I wanted the true tokens of a truly godly man” (15).

Some time later, as he walks alone in the country (much like the pre-converted Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*), Bunyan entertains the thought that the way to the Bedford saints is closed for him: “Now I remember that one day as I was walking in the Country, [. . .] the Tempter presented to my mind those good people of Bedford, and suggested thus unto me, That these being converted already, they were all that God would save in those parts, & that I came too late, for these had got the blessing before I came” (21). This conviction settles into Bunyan’s mind. In a passage revealing the futility he is feeling, Bunyan writes, “Sometimes I would tell my condition to the people of God;

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155 All quotations from *Grace Abounding* are from John Stachniewski’s 1998 Oxford’s World Classics edition.
which when they heard, they would pity me, and would tell me of the Promises; but they had as good have told me that I must reach the Sun with my finger” (25). The despairing solitude reaches its zenith shortly thereafter, when Bunyan confesses that “now was I sorry that God had made me a man, for I feared I was a reprobate: I counted man, as unconverted, the most doleful of all the Creatures: Thus being afflicted and tossed about by my sad condition, I counted my self alone, and above the most of men unblest” (27).

This focus on the isolation of the struggling soul might cause one to conclude that Bunyan did not—could not—count on any outside help in this matter of his salvation. But here I have argued that *Grace Abounding* is just such an appeal to a community for help. On the surface, it appears that Bunyan is writing in order to help those who might follow after him through the same sort of temptations he faced. The treatise, however, is addressed to people who already enjoy grace, not someone who is in limbo concerning his or her eternal destiny. Bunyan says in his preface that “The Philistines understand me not” (3), meaning that those who read the text without having already received God’s grace will not be able to understand its main import. Bunyan himself has experienced the futility of hearing spiritual things while lacking a renewed, grace-filled heart. In the early parts of his struggle, he hears godly women talking. “I drew near,” he says, “to hear what they said; for I was now a brisk talker also my self in the matters of Religion: but now I may say, *I heard, but I understood not*, for they were far above out of my reach, for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts” (14). Elsewhere Bunyan confesses, “Sometimes I would tell my condition to the people of God; which when they heard, they would pity me, and would tell me of the Promises; but they had as good have
told me that I must reach the Sun with my finger, as have bidden me receive or relie upon the Promise” (25). Someone who has experienced the futility of trying to receive help through “other men’s words” would surely not expect his own book to provide this help. He imagines a community of readers who are among the saved. In the preface he asks his readers to watch him: “It is a Relation of the work of God upon my own Soul, even from the very first, till now; wherein you may perceive my castings down, and raisings up” (3). They should do so in order that they might remember the gracious way God called them into their own salvation: “Wherefore this I have endeavoured to do; and not onely so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their Souls, by reading his work upon me” (4). Their own struggles Bunyan places in the past. Bunyan asks his readers to “call to mind the former days, the years of ancient times; remember also your songs in the night [. . .]. Remember, I say, the Word that first laid hold upon you; remember your terrours of conscience, and fear of death and hell: remember also your tears and prayers to God [. . .]. Remember also the Word, the Word, I say, upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope” (5). I grant that a large part of Bunyan’s purpose is to somehow encourage those who might still pass through these trials, but an ulterior motive for authorship seems to be at play. Bunyan writes what he does, to whom he does, perhaps so that they can recognize themselves in him. If they see themselves as elect, and Bunyan assumes they will, then they will see him as one of the elect, also.

Within the narrative, Bunyan desperately needs people to tell him that he is not in any real danger of an eternal death. He fails to find sympathetic voices. When he wonders
whether he might possibly have a genealogical connection to the Israelites, God’s chosen people, he asks his father, who promptly answers in the negative. To this Bunyan relays, “wherefore then I fell in my spirit, as to the hopes of that, and so remained” (10). When he talks to “an Antient Christian” about his denying Christ, in order to see whether or not there was a chance that he had not committed the unpardonable sin, Bunyan again fails to find comfort: “I told him also, that I was afraid that I had sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost; and he told me, he thought so too. Here therefore I had but cold comfort” (51).

Bunyan finally finds a friendly voice. It is the finished, published voice of Bunyan unto himself:

In this Discourse of mine, you may see much; much, I say, of the Grace of God towards me: I thank God I can count it much; for it was above my sins, and Satans temptations too. I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad moneths, with comfort; they are as the head of Goliah in my hand: there was nothing to David like Golias sword, even that sword that should have been sheathed in his bowels; for the very sight and remembrance of that, did preach forth Gods Deliverance to him. O the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears of perishing for ever! They bring fresh into my mind, the remembrance of my great help, my great support from Heaven, and the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as I. (4-5)

The writing of spiritual autobiography is, then, a good counter against death, but Bunyan produces something even better—a positive text that receives the stamp of approval from an audience who is fit to ascertain one’s position in election or damnation. Bunyan
admits that this communal consensus was extremely important to him. Speaking about those who approved of his preaching, he says,

Wherefore seeing them in both their words and deeds to be so constant, & also in their hearts so earnestly pressing after the knowledge of Jesus Christ, rejoicing that ever God did send me where they were: then I began to conclude it might be so, that God had owned in his Work such a foolish one as I [. . .]. At this therefore I rejoiced; yea, the tears of those whom God did awaken by my preaching, would be both solace and encouragement to me; for I thought on those Sayings, *Who is he that maketh me glad, but the same that is made sorry by me?* 2 Cor. 2.2. and again, *Though I be not an Apostle to others, yet doubtless I am unto you, for the seal of my Apostleship are ye in the Lord,* 1. Cor. 9.2. (77-78).

This audience’s consensus of Bunyan as elect might be hoped to remain stable even were Bunyan again to feel doubt in his own heart, because his own interior battle would not encompass the audience in the same way as an individual self in which the doubt is localized. Thus, by construing a printed, material version of himself—his textual “son”—that can be separated from his body and taken to be regenerate by those who received his text, Bunyan can transfer to himself as a dampening mechanism for his own doubt the audience’s voice of approval over his progeny. Were Bunyan to doubt his election after his autobiography’s publication, he could perhaps find comfort in the hopeful, sustaining voices of the elect community who knows his own interior spaces only by means of the ameliorative autobiography. *Grace Abounding* has captured once and for all an alignment of the tensions within Bunyan and, and in being birthed into the world by Bunyan, has
moved that representation into the light and away from Bunyan’s inner spaces, where confusion and doubt may again be in the offing.
Conclusion

An Abstraction of the Commonalities of These Defenses against Death

To better situate my closing comments, a short synopsis of the arguments of this study is in order.

In Chapter One, “Writing Grief and Surviving Death in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess,*” I argue that when the narrator positions himself into a dream in a story that he is writing down, he creates a remove between himself as a person who is awake in the text itself and himself as a dreamed figure, a person who is awake only in a dream in the text and who is being observed by the dreamer (the narrator) in the same way any dreamer is cognizant of the content of his or her dream. As a result, the narrator upon awakening can always distance himself from the dreamed figure by claiming that the figure was obviously part of only a dream.

The black knight is the character in the poem who is visibly the most affected by the grief caused by a loved one’s death. Since the narrator meets the black knight through an avatar of himself in a dream, the narrator creates a double remove between himself and the locus of grief, the black knight. These removes provide the necessary distance for the narrator to encounter his deadly sickness without receiving more harm. The encounter is important because it gives the narrator an opportunity to analyze the malady: to understand the sickness is his first step toward eradicating it. Furthermore, when he
awakes, he continues this pattern of creating removes by immediately codifying his experience on paper. This objectifying and stabilizing of the interpretation of the experience prevents his potentially faulty (or treacherous) memory from forgetting or reshaping his effective countering of his problem. Neither the black knight nor Alcyone can make similar removes. The black knight does control his grief by orally versifying it, but because his poems are not written down, they are not permanent, stable, external aids. As a result, the knight will have to undergo the trauma again when the vocalized words have ended and the troubled memory returns. Alcyone does not even have a temporary respite in her grief: the final loss of her words, coupled with her inability to remove herself even conceptually from Seys, locks her into contact with the stultifying effects of her husband’s death.

In Chapter Two, “Imagining a Good Death: Thomas More’s *Dialogue of Comfort* and the Dynamics of the Public Gaze,” I examine More’s tendency toward role-playing or self-fashioning, the existence of which in More can be established by incidents from More’s life. In Antonio, who can be seen in the text to be a thinly disguised figure for the writer, More makes a role for himself to play. With the *Dialogue of Comfort* being circulated among family and friends well before More’s execution actually takes place, More convokes an audience who expects him to act out his (or Antonio’s) own advice about dying well. Thus, the future encounter between More and a violent, public death is controlled beforehand by More because he sets up imaginative perimeters around the experience by means of the dialogue in *Dialogue of Comfort*. His counter is effective because it scripts for More that which, if left unscripted, would threaten to undo More at
the very moment when the values of his life were to be most tested. For if the fear of
death had conquered More at the last minute, his execution would have hardly been taken
to be a good testimony (or, literally, a good martyrdom) to More’s professed values.
Moreover, with the script having been read beforehand by his close circle, More would
sense a positive pressure to stay in the role he as created for himself. In this way he
utilizes a public gaze to his own advantage instead of acquiescing to the original intention
of the gaze, which was to shame him in the eyes of the public and to bolster the royal
prerogative.

The thesis of my third chapter, “To Death and Back Again: Pericles, Prince of Tyre
and Forms of Life in the Family,” is that Pericles mitigates a physical death by getting
married and having children. The play represents the union of husband and wife as a
rejuvenating matrix from which a new form of the parents can come to life in the bodies
of the children. Marriage and progeny are a counter to the father’s death in particular. If
he is willing to give away his daughter, a fertile womb of his making, to an exogamous
male who resembles him, then he can ensure that his form will spread into a community,
a self-renewing organism, and away from his own death-bound body.

In Chapter Four, “John Donne, Godly Inscription, and Permanency of Self in
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, I show how death’s inchoate effects register
themselves upon Donne’s body, seeking eventually to overrun the whole body in the full-
blown sickness. Donne, however, counters the threat by observing his own sick body at a
cognitive distance. This distance helps Donne create an alternate body (the Devotions)
wherein the pernicious effects of the sickness are stabilized and eventually dismissed.
Because most of the text is addressed to God, Donne can be viewed as asking God to read his text. In this way God stores Donne’s text, which includes a purged version of Donne’s body, in his infallible, eternal memory.

Finally, in Chapter Five, “John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, Eternal Death, and the Assurance of the Elect Community’s Approving Gaze,*” I emphasize the fact that since Bunyan operated under a Calvinistic paradigm that created a consistently tenuous position of assurance for its adherents, good works could never be sure evidence of regeneration. Only God really knew whether one was saved or not. Nevertheless, the more signs one could accumulate that betokened a presence of grace, the better, insofar as the record could do something toward appeasing an overly troubled soul. If Bunyan had to find signs of life in order to ascertain to his own satisfaction that he had probably escaped from the pale of death, then he surely did so in *Grace Abounding.* But he went a step further by representing himself as being engaged in an extreme conflict with the living words of Scripture and then publishing that representation to his congregation as a model. This countermove against death is grounded in a sort of *a fortiori:* if the text is alive with powerful words, then how much more life resides in its author, and if the text is stable in its representation of Bunyan’s inner man—unchangeable in the way a printed, published, and distributed text is unchangeable—then how much more so the creator of the text. In this way the book seeks to build up an external, positive evaluation (the approbation of the readership) of Bunyan that would remain stable even if Bunyan the author happened to relapse into self-doubt.

As these summaries shows, the countermoves exercised in these texts are variegated.
There is no one template or credo that alone is sufficient to dispel death’s threat in all cases. But the defenses against death examined in this study do contain versions of a few foundational commonalities. The fact that from this common base such differing superstructures of defense can be raised should comfort any individual who, struggling with the thought that death is inevitable, feels that only a solution tailored for his or her unique personal condition will do.

Chaucer, More, Donne, and Bunyan wrote under the conviction that the text would help a certain community of readers with their own struggles against death. In this concern for the community at large, even when they themselves faced a personal struggle, these authors imply that they willingly found strength in number. It is almost indisputable that Chaucer wrote *Book of the Duchess* to console John of Gaunt in the loss of his wife Blanche of Lancaster. If so, the poem most likely was meant to be read aloud to the family and other mourners. Chaucer would have written it, then, with the court community in mind. In the *Dialogue of Comfort*, More alludes to the community of Catholics in Hungary (i.e., England) numerous times, in the main exhorting that the community’s faithfulness during this trying time of Henry VIII’s break with Rome will be rewarded. On a more personal level, the way some of his fictitious scenes parallel known accounts of the experiences of his large family along with the “in-humor” built into the text—phrases, descriptions, and responses that form parodies of family members—indicate that he expected his family and friends to recognize themselves in the text as the core community to whom Antonio address his advice. Shakespeare’s reasons for writing *Pericles* is much less clear, but he does write the community of the family
into *Pericles* as a seminal defense against death. A father who gives his daughter away so that she can marry and have legitimate children helps a community renew itself even as its older constituents die. Donne openly believes that the large community of believers his work is meant for is connected on a level far past the notional, as his famous line “No man is an island” in Meditation 17 indicates. And Bunyan not only yearns to join the community of believers described in his text; he eventually thinks he does, and addresses the finished work to his “children,” his congregation that would read it for comfort in their own struggles.

All five texts employ the technique of removing the main character or the author’s persona from the presence of death. In the *Book of the Duchess*, the narrator first falls asleep before confronting death on a personal level. In his sleep he conjures up a figure he takes to be himself, and it is this figure the narrator uses as proxy in order to approach the black knight so that he might examine the knight’s grief up close. The double remove of the dream and the proxy allow the narrator, once he wakes up, to reflect upon his experience without having to worry about its emotional effects. In the *Dialogue of Comfort*, More claims he is translating the work from a French version, which itself is a translation of the original Latin manuscript written by the Hungarian author. More creates a fiction in which he, the author, is at least twice removed from the figure Antonio, who is old, feeble, and sick. Moreover, the ultimate figure of death in this text is the Turk. Antonio discourses to Vincent about the Turk, but nowhere in the text do Turks

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156 More’s full title for his treatise is *A Dialoge of Comfort against Trybulcion, Made by an Hungaryen in Laten. & Translatyd out of Laten into French, & out of French into Englysh*. Although most modern editions of the treatise do not carry More’s complete title, the most authoritative one, the Yale edition by Martz and Manley, does.
actually appear. Antonio keeps this figure of death from himself by relegating it to the realm of story and conversation. In *Pericles*, Pericles is apt to physically remove himself from the presence of death—he flees Antiochus throughout much of the first part of the play. But in his flight, he finds and marries the princess Thaisa and has Marina. When Pericles experiences a psychosis, Marina comes to him and carefully pulls him out again. Marina can be viewed as a form of Pericles, “begetting” Pericles just as he begat her. In Marina, then, Pericles has already effected a remove from death. That it is Marina alone who resurrects Pericles suggests that it is this remove that eventually allows a form of himself to examine death in himself and to conquer it. Donne removes himself from death in his *Devotions* in assuming the role of an observer of the sick body on the bed. In distancing himself from his body to carry out meditations upon it, he leaves the disease with the physical matter that constitutes his body. Bunyan in *Grace Abounding* attempts to remove himself from death’s presence by trapping it in the pages of his spiritual autobiography. Unlike any of the above authors, Bunyan writes in past tense. Perhaps this choice of tense is his way of trying to convince himself again that his experience with doubt, with despair over a possible Second Death looming over him, has been dealt with once for all, since a record of the climactic struggle has already been produced, printed, and published.

Four of the authors—Chaucer, More, Donne, and Bunyan—foreground the act of gazing upon death. Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* has the narrator “looking” at Alcyone as he reads her story in a book of ancient fables. Within his own dream, the dreamed figure, an avatar for the narrator, uses a much more personalized and involved gaze as
watches the black knight grieve. More turns himself into an object for the gaze, setting himself up to take advantage of his public execution to create an image of himself as a martyr. The eyes of the community upon him as a figure of death give him the strength to accept his execution. Donne’s Devotions clearly portrays the sick man gazing upon his body as he lies upon his bed, in order to meditate upon it further. Donne writes his observations in present tense, suggesting that this self gaze (a literal au[O-]opsy) is an important element in the way the Devotions should be read. Of course, the doctors are asked to gaze upon his body, also, in the performing of their duties, so Donne must position this sick body in a public space. His determination to publish his Devotions shows he was willing to drastically expand the publicity of his body as an object for the gaze.157 And in Grace Abounding, John Bunyan describes at least two scenes where he is gazing intently upon something—in a dream he gazes upon a community of believers resting in a sunny, fenced-in area on a mountain, and in a vision he imagines himself gazing upon the crucified Christ. Both experiences cause Bunyan deeply to desire salvation and freedom from the bondage of his doubt. But much more prevalent in the narrative is the perspective the character Bunyan assumes as he reflects upon his condition. His reflection is, at its core, an act of gazing.

The notions of community, of removal, and of gazing are connected with each other. To write about death, one must first think about it. To think about death, one must introduce a displacement or abstraction between the self and death: one backs away from

157 Donne’s Devotions was one of his few prose works to be published during Donne’s lifetime. Targoff points out that that Donne was eager for its quick publication (152), which, given his usual hesitancy to publish his secular and religious poetry (Marotti x-xi), seems to be a good indication that Donne thought an outside readership (that is, a readership other than Donne himself) was somehow necessary to the ultimate purposes of his book.
death in order to gain the necessary space to focus in upon it. In holding death at arms’
length, if you will, the author employs removal for the purpose of the gaze. That is, the
notions of the gaze and of removal are bound up in each other: one cannot do one without
doing the other. When an author then writes artistically about what has been gazed upon,
the author creates a representation of death that is subjected to the author’s choices of
framing and fashioning. Equally importantly, the author can close the encounter in that
the author can write an ending to the imagined encounter. These scribal acts are acts of
control that can instill the author with a confidence that was lacking before the act of
writing began. Community comes into play in that when an author publishes the
representation, it is ultimately with public intent. This is to say, the author presents a
body of readers a view of death that has been represented by his artistry and uses his de
facto authority over the representation as a warrant to instruct the readership on how the
representation is to be understood. What was once threatening to overwhelm the author in
its chaos and destruction has now been given order and closure by means of the author’s
creativity and has been set up as the object of a community’s gaze in order that the
individual community members might not have to face death unprepared and alone.

The process of turning an encounter with death into a public, controlled
representation that ends up benefiting the communal audience who view the spectacle
from a safe remove is the essential countermove against death. When one sets out to write
about one’s own death, he or she must first imagine how the physical body will come up
against death. The actual writing of the literary piece transfers the locale of the dispute

158 See the etymology of publish in OED, 2nd ed.
from the physical body to the body of the text, where the encounter can run its course within the framework of the pages and under the auspices of the author. Once it text is finished, the author can re-enter with more confidence the arena outside the text where death is personal, physical, inevitable.

It is as if these authors needed to practice dying somewhere where they could exert more of themselves into the fray, more control and commitment to the form of the fight. For them, this place was the text, where their authority as authors could come to the fore. Once they faced death here, in a controlled setting, then somehow the knowledge that eventually they would have to undergo an actual death might have become easier to bear.

One cannot say much about Chaucer and Shakespeare, literary giants whose biographies are notoriously slim and stingy with the facts, but when More died on the scaffold praying for his king, when Donne died reciting the Lord’s Prayer, and when Bunyan died on a pastoral trip trying to reconcile an estranged family, all died fairly well, arrested by death during the course of activity that each thought was part of his calling in life.
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159 This citation illustrates well a particular problem with *Moreana*. The serial publishes both English and French articles and was apparently first formatted under a strange issue-volume organization (the issue comprising the volumes, as opposed to the normal volume-issue organization). Also, as this publication started out more as a gazette or a bulletin than as a journal, there would be numbers of issues, with their corresponding volumes’ numbers, associated with any given year. More recently, the serial has adopted the usual volume-issue numbering, but to continue its original numbering as well, the modern issues in the citations carry two numbers before the year. I have followed the pattern, shown in some of these modern issues (but by no means by all of them), of indicating the new numbering of volumes in Roman numerals


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