

## **“I Finde Myself Scattered”: The Body as a Book in John Donne**

*by Stephen Rojcewicz*

John Donne (1572-1631), metaphysical poet and famed Church of England preacher, displays in much of his poetry, theological speculations, devotional prose, sermons and correspondence the recurrent fear that his body would be scattered after his death, perhaps even mixed with the remains of other individuals. Dreading annihilation into absolute nothingness, Donne obsesses on how the soul reunites with the body at the resurrection of the dead and on the theme of collecting one's missing parts. Central to addressing his fear is the metaphor of his body as a book, a book in which God has written. As I will show, his metaphor takes on another dimension by his writing in Latin, in which the flexibility of word order allows words to be scattered almost anywhere in the clause, since it is the endings, not the sequence, that determines the meaning. In particular, I will examine “Stationes,” the Latin poetic preface to *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and seuerall steps in my Sicknes* and several prose passages in *Devotions*, exploring how the concept of his body as a book pervades Donne's thought. A comparison of the Latin with English translations demonstrates the advantage of Latin in providing multiple meanings simultaneously and in gathering into a coherent whole words scattered throughout the clause or sentence, and the unique power of Latin syntactic enactment, in which the word placement mimics the sense of what is being said. In addition, I will investigate the Latin poem, “De Libro cum mutuaretur” [“Concerning the book, when it was lent”], written after Donne had lent a printed book to Dr. Andrews whose children tore it to pieces, although Dr. Andrews then reconstituted the book as a handwritten manuscript. The creation of a new manuscript from scattered parts is a figure for Donne's hope for a perfect

reunion of the body and soul at the resurrection. Donne seeks to become unified, perfectly himself, through his participation in what he calls God's "majesty of the word" by developing the overarching metaphor of his body as a book. Through his use of Latin linguistic and syntactic characteristics, Donne turns his body into a book, identifying with the power of God to change metaphor into actuality.

*Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and seuerall steps in my Sicknes* (written 1623, printed 1624), Donne's most exhaustive examination of his body, especially in sickness and its religious implications, is an account of the development of his life-threatening illness and the subsequent convalescence.<sup>1</sup> The *Devotions* has not been studied as thoroughly as other works by the author, although it contains what are probably his two most famous quotations: "No Man is an Iland" and "never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*." (Meditation XVII, p. 87). *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, for example, prints 29 poems by Donne and an excerpt from a sermon, but only a one-page section from *Devotions* containing "For Whom the Bell Tolls."<sup>2</sup> The title itself points to the metaphorical nature of the writing. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the meaning of the word "emergent" to "unexpectedly arising" in 1593 and as referring to "an unforeseen occurrence" in 1620, the primary meaning of "emergent" is that which "arises from or out of something prior" (1619) or "rising out of a surrounding medium" (1627).<sup>3</sup> Arshagouni (Papazian) has noted that Donne himself defined "emergent" in a September 1622 sermon as "How the words were spoken then, How they may be applied now."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donne (1624) and Raspa (1975). I cite the *Devotions* from Raspa's edition. A facsimile of the 1624 first edition can be found at:  
<http://books.google.com/books?vid=OCLC15642092&id=NdYMAAAAIAAJ&pg=PP7&lpg=PP7#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>2</sup> Danrosch (1999), pp. 1549-1571.

<sup>3</sup> *OED*, "E", p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Arshagouni (1991), p. 205.

In *Devotions*, Donne develops the concept of God as a metaphor-creating God who has the power to turn his metaphors into reality:

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 (*Lord* I intend it to thy *glory*, and let no *prophane mis-interpreter* abuse it to thy *diminution*), thou art a *figurative*, a *metaphoricall God* too. ... Neither art thou thus a *figurative*, a *metaphoricall God*, in thy *word* only, but in thy *workes* too. ... [in] the *phrase* of thine *Actions*.” (Expostulation XIX; Rapsa, pp. 99-100.) [Spelling, punctuation and italics as in the original].

It is crucial for Donne not only that God is both a literal and a metaphorical god, but more importantly, that he can turn his metaphors into actions, his words into reality.

An overarching theme throughout all of John Donne’s literary genres is a focus on the union of the body and the soul. According to Ramie Targoff, “the relationship between the body and soul ... was the defining bond ... of his life.” This belief defined not only his writings, but also his entire life. She further writes: “His experiences of friendship and love, health and illness, work and leisure, were all conditioned by the interactions between the two parts of the self.”<sup>5</sup> Targoff has argued persuasively that Donne’s central preoccupations included the separation of the soul and body at death, and the fear of dispersal of body parts. Such a preoccupation occurs in homilies such as his “Sermon on Job 19.26;” his “Sermon on Matthew 22.30;” the sermon preached at the wedding of the Earl of Bridgewater’s daughter; and “Death’s Duell,” the final homily of his life, often called his own funeral sermon.<sup>6</sup> Among the poems demonstrating an obsession with collecting one’s missing bodily parts after death are Holy Sonnet VII “A Valediction: of my name, in the window;” “The Second Anniversary,” “The Relique,” and “Obsequies to the Lord Harrington.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Targoff (2008), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-169.

<sup>7</sup> Donne (1991), pp. 71, 352-371, 385- 394, 438.

Donne often uses the same word, “scattered,” for body parts after death, as in these lines:

Till my returne, repaire  
And recompact my scattered body so. (“A Valediction: of my name,” lines 31-32).

Arise  
From death, you numberlesse infinities  
Of soules, and to your scatterd bodies goe. (Holy Sonnet VII, lines 2-4).

Donne also applies “scattered” to his own identity, writing in one sermon about his attempts at praying, “I finde myself scattered, melted”<sup>8</sup> Donne indeed found himself scattered in many ways: in his soul, his body, and the union of the two. In reference to the body after death, scattering becomes even more terrifying for Donne because of two possibilities. Robert Reeder has noted that Meditation XVIII of *Devotions* contrasts our birth with the random dispersal of our dust after death.<sup>9</sup> As Donne wrote in this meditation:

Such a *Mother in law* is the *Earth*, in respect of our *naturall Mother*; in her [our natural Mother’s] *wombe* we *grew* [but] ... In the *wombe* of the *Earth* wee *diminish*, and when shee is *delivered* of us, our *grave* opened for another, wee are not *transplanted*, but *transported*, our *dust* blowne away with *prophane dust*, with every wind. (Raspa, p. 93).

In addition, in several sermons Donne discussed an additional hypothesis for the mix-up of bodily remains after death, through the processes of eating and being eaten. “Supposing a man is eaten by a fish ... and then the fish is eaten by a second man. How will God sort out the first man from the second?”<sup>10</sup>

Multiple factors determined Donne’s obsession with the scattering of body, mind and soul. Donne’s family was Catholic, and he grew up in a milieu of tortures, traumatic dislocation of joints, dismemberments of limbs, acts of vivisection, disemboweling alive and acts of being

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<sup>8</sup> Donne, *Sermons* III, 76, cited in Carey (1981), p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> Reeder (2012), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Donne, *Sermons* III, 97; VI, 156, 274; VII, 115, cited in Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

drawn and quartered, all of which Elizabethan executioners inflicted on Catholics who had sheltered priests, including on Thomas Thomas Heywood, the uncle of Donne's mother.<sup>11</sup> Donne's brother had been arrested in this case, but he died soon thereafter in prison. John Donne himself had attended such executions; the memory of the tortures and vivisection remain important elements in Donne. Moreover, Donne was aware of the practice of scattering the body of heretics after their death; in some cases in England the bodies of heretics were burned and the ashes scattered, in order that total destruction would leave nothing for misguided followers to venerate.<sup>12</sup> This could occur many decades after burial, even if the individual had originally been buried with full religious rites. John Wyclif, for example, was given a regular church funeral in 1384; in 1415 his writings were judged heretical, and in 1428 his remains were disinterred and the bones burned, with the ashes thrown into a stream.<sup>13</sup> As a possible apostate, Donne may have feared being subjected to such a practice himself.

Modern criticism has often focused on what may be a second factor to Donne's obsession with bodily scattering: his response to the New Science, the cosmological and atomistic speculations. According to Donne's 1611 poem, "The First Anniversary. An Anatomy of the World," the "new Philosophy calls all in doubt."<sup>14</sup> A few lines later he writes: "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone".<sup>15</sup> His engagement with the Copernican Revolution, with developments in physics and medicine, and with atomistic philosophy had resulted in massive doubt, primarily translated as an overwhelming anxiety about the scattering of his body after death, and a concern about the reunion of the body and soul. For Donne, this was the true disaster: obsessions with how the soul reunites with the body, a fear of annihilation, and an obsession with collecting

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<sup>11</sup> Carey, *ibid.*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>12</sup> Whaley (1981), p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Donne (1611/1991), line 205.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, line 215.

one's missing bodily parts. Meditation I of *Devotions* indicates that Donne's responses, even when theological and doctrinal, will also be to the "new Philosophy," by applying apocalyptic images, from Biblical sources as well as images from developments in natural philosophy, to the life of humanity: earthquakes, sudden shakings, eclipses, disasters:

Is this the honour which Man hath by being a *little world*, That he hath these *earthquakes* in him selfe, sodaine shakings; these *lightnings*, sodaine flashes; these *thunders*, sodaine noises; these Eclipses, sodain offuscations, & darkning of his senses; these *blazing stars*, sodaine fiery exhalations; these *rivers of blood*, sodaine red waters?" (Meditation I, pp. 7-8).

As Lisa Gorton noted in a study of Donne's poems and letters, however, he can be described as "sometimes referring to the new philosophy, and sometimes writing as if he'd never heard of it. He chooses the philosophy that illustrates what he wants to say."<sup>16</sup> In Donne's writing about the end of the world and eventual resurrection of the body the "new Philosophy" is prominent, but this is not the only source for his obsession with scattering and recombination of his body.

A third major factor in Donne's fear was his wide reading in contemporary and classical authors, including Lucan and Plutarch.<sup>17</sup> After his death Donne was found to have kept detailed notes on over 1400 authors, classical and contemporary. Lucan's epic *Civil War* or *Pharsalia* (*De Bello Civili*, 60-65 CE) appears to have been a major influence, with its vivid descriptions of bodily dismemberment throughout the poem, including the witch Erichtho's terrifying re-assembly of body parts in a temporary resurrection, and her snatching a limb from a wolf who had eaten a corpse.<sup>18</sup> In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates, awaiting his death, states that his companion Cebes "has the childish fear that when the soul goes out from the body the wind will really blow it away and scatter it, especially if a man happens to die in a high wind and not in calm

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<sup>16</sup> Gorton (1998), pp. 1-27.

<sup>17</sup> Lebars (1972), pp. 127-137.

<sup>18</sup> Lucan (60-65 CE/1988), esp. ll. 2.118-220, 3.603-626, and 6.565-849.

weather.”<sup>19</sup> The Greek word Plato used for “scatter” in this passage is *diaskedannusin*, from *skedannumi*.

Anthony Raspa, in his “Introduction” to an edition of the *Devotions*, has argued that the nature of this book hinges on two recurrent terms, *word* and *type*.<sup>20</sup> Donne thought in terms of Biblical typology, which pervades the text. As Andreasen has written, for Donne, or for anyone raised in the traditions of scriptural exegesis, the typological relationship is more than metaphorical; Biblical types indicate a necessary and a logical relationship between phenomena.<sup>21</sup> Donne’s references to the Bible are in agreement with the importance of typology, but he emphasizes that the *word* of God may be, by its very nature, different things to different people, that to one person the word of God “is the reverent simplicity of the word, and to another the majesty of the word” (*Devotions*, Expostulation XIX). In Prayer XIII of *Devotions*, he combines the idea of his own body in sickness, the concept of a book, and God’s use of metaphor:

These heates, *O Lord*, which thou hast broght upon this *body*, are but thy chafing of the *wax*, that thou mightst *seale* me to thee; These *spots* are but the *letters*, in which thou hast written thine owne *Name*, and conveyed thy selfe to mee;

The image of the body as a book is prominent in Donne’s poetry as well as in *Devotions*. In “The Extasie,” first printed in 1633, Donne writes:

Loves mysteries in soules do grow,  
But yet the body is his booke.<sup>22</sup>

We will see how Donne uses the unique features of Latin in his Latin poems to develop this metaphor into a solution for his fears of bodily dispersal.

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 77D-E, in Fowler, tr., (390s BCE/2001), pp. 270-271.

<sup>20</sup> Raspa, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

<sup>21</sup> Andreasen, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> Donne (1633/1991), lines 71-72.

While Donne engaged with this metaphor throughout his life, two of his most profound explications of the body as a book occur in his Latin poems, “Stationes” and “De Libro cum mutuaretur.” Standing as a preface to the *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, “Stationes,” a 22-line Latin poem in classical hexameters, has elicited little careful examination. The poem appears twice, once in a complete version at the beginning of the book, and then in a scattered form, different quotations being placed before each of the book’s 23 main sections. In this scattered format, Donne eventually uses all the lines but gives only one portion at a time, anywhere from a single word to three lines, each citation being related to the accompanying Meditation. He also provides one or more English sentences or phrases related to the Latin; these English versions, however, are neither translations nor paraphrases, but rough approximations. Mary Arshagouni (Papazian) gives the example of *solus adest* from hexameter line 3. Donne provides the English as “The Phisician comes,” but this translates *adest*, and ignores *solus*, “alone.” The text of the Devotion that follows, however, focuses strongly on solitude, which is derived from “solus” (Devotion V, pp. 24-28). It seems most accurate refer to the corresponding English texts with the term used by Arshagouni, “English headnotes.”<sup>23</sup>

On the occasions when critics even mention the Latin text, they usually do not integrate it into a discussion of the *Devotions* or they view it not as a poem but as a table of contents. Some scholars have erroneously related the term “Stationes” to the “Stations of the Cross,”<sup>24</sup> which at that time were not yet a common religious practice outside pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and were called not *stationes*, but *supplicatio stativa*,<sup>25</sup> (i.e., “prayer while standing”). Most modern editions (e.g., the Project Gutenberg version) do not even print the Latin verses of “Stationes” all in one place, but scatter it among dozens of pages, each quotation in front of the corresponding

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<sup>23</sup> Arshagouni, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>24</sup> Novarr (1980), pp. 164-170.

<sup>25</sup> Sellin (1983), p. 244, cited by Arshagouni, *op. cit.*, p. 199.



Meditation.<sup>26</sup> Some scholars have severely criticized the literary merit of the *Stationes*. David Novarr, for example, has written that the *Stationes* seems hardly to be a poem at all:

It has a metrical design: its words have some sonority... and some consonantal pattern is used. But ‘Stationes’ is a singularly bare enumeration of the stages in Donne’s illness, more an arid outline of his sickness than a narrative ... The poem has none of Donne’s customary wit, drama, and imagination. It has little sustained rhetoric: not only are the words broken by numbers, but some of the expression is fragmentary. We get emphasis, but not coherence; ‘Stationes’ strikes us a group of tags, some very short some longer.<sup>27</sup>

“Stationes” is certainly not a good English poem as usually translated, but it is a superb Latin poem, brilliantly illustrating the point that Donne created this work to address his fear of disaster and death, especially the separation of the soul from his body, and the feared dispersal of bodily elements after death. The poetic and emotional value of “Stationes” is manifested through such elements as the poetic meter; word placement; the multiple meanings and resonances of specific Latin words (e.g., *stigmata* and *numerosus*); syntactic enactment, in which the sentence structure or word placement mimics the sense of what is being said; traditional classical poetic effects and figures of speech; and intrinsic connection to other Latin poems, including one written by Donne, “De Libro cum mutuaretur.” The above characteristics make the “Stationes” a true poem, but one that can only be fully appreciated in Latin.

I will focus on two lines, 10-11, in which Donne signals that his body is a book, indeed that his body is a poem that God has written:

*Atq. Malum Genium, numeroso stigmatē, fassus,*

*Pellitur ad pectus, Morbique Suburbia, Morbus:*

The adjective *numerosus*, from the noun *numerus*, “number,” has several meanings: in addition to the strict mathematical sense, it was a standard term for poetic measure or metrical lines.

Donne uses “number” in this sense in “The triple Foole”:

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<sup>26</sup> Donne (1624/1959).

<sup>27</sup> Novarr, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,  
For he tames it, that fetters it in verse.<sup>28</sup>

“The triple Foole” emphasizes the role of metrical practice in “taming” the emotion, so that it can be subject to review, balance, expression, and control.

*Numerosus* was a favorite word of the classical Latin poets, especially the elegists, in referring to poetic meter, even when they were ostensibly using the mathematical meaning of the term. The first-century BCE poet Propertius, for example, writes in *Carmina*, Book 4, Poem 7: *qua numerosa fides*, where *numerosa* simultaneously indicates “*numerous lutes*,” and a lyre “playing in *rhythm*.”<sup>29</sup> This particular elegy by Propertius, combining an emphasis on love and on death, has been shown to be a major direct influence on Donne’s poem, “The Canonization.”<sup>30</sup>

Here is my first translation of lines 10-11: “**And the sickness (*Morbus*), having declared (*fassus*) its evil character (*Malum Genium*) by means of many a spot, is driven onto the chest (*Pellitur ad pectus*) and onto the suburbs/secondary manifestations (*Morbique Suburbia*) of the illness” (*Morbus*). Syntactically, Donne represents the direct result of the illness as occurring between the first and the last words, the last word being the grammatical subject, *Morbus*, and the first major word being the direct object, *Malum*. Donne’s strategic placement of the effects between these words is an example of what Donald Lateiner, in his classic 1990 paper, “Mimetic Syntax,” describes as *syntactic enactment* or *mimetic syntax*, in which the sentence structure or word placement mimics the sense of what is being said.<sup>31</sup> Other classic examples of syntactic enactment include the spatial separation of words that themselves indicate separation, and the interlocking of words to refer to the act of weaving.**

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<sup>28</sup> Donne (1633/1991), p. 59, lines 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> Hutchinson (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Revard (1986), pp. 69-79, esp. p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> Lateiner (1990), pp. 204-237.

A second example of syntactic enactment in this same line is the close placement of *Morbique Suburbia* and *Morbus*. *Suburbia* literally means “the area close to a city,” so Donne places the “Suburbs of Sickness” immediately adjacent to “Sickness,” so that the Suburbs are close to their central location both logically and in terms of word placement. Donne could not effect these syntactic enactments in English. We shall see another pertinent example of syntactic enactment in Donne’s Latin poem, “De Libro cum mutuaretur.”

Additional poetic effects occur in the phrase “*Morbique Suburbia, Morbus*.” The internal repetition of the “rb” sound echoes the alliteration of the immediately preceding words, *Pellitur ad pectus*. *Morbi* and *Morbus* are the genitive and nominative cases, respectively, of *morbus*. Donne has here provided an example of *polyptoton*, a classical figure of speech using two or more grammatical cases of the same word.

Here is my second translation of the same lines, emphasizing the connotation of *numerosus* as “metrical”: “**And the sickness, having declared its evil character by means of a rhythmically metrical mark (*numero stigmatate*), is driven onto my heart (*Pellitur ad pectus*) and onto poetic/metaphorical manifestations of the illness.**”

Donne translates the Latin word *stigmatate* (from *stigma*) as “spot.” Originally the word meant a tattoo or a brand to mark a slave for identification, but was first given a Christian context in Paul’s *Letter to the Galatians* 6.17, where he writes that “I bear in my body the marks [*stigmata*, in the original Greek and in the Latin Vulgate] of the Lord Jesus.” Beginning in 1224, when St. Francis of Assisi received marks on his body, the term *stigmata* has referred to the bodily marks, wounds or sensations of pain corresponding to the wounds of Christ. Donne’s choice of “spots” to translate *stigmata* seems very mild, but he clearly identifies his “spots” with the metaphor of his body as a book, written upon by God: “these spots are but the letters in

which thou hast written thine own name and conveyed thyself to me” (Prayer XIII, p. 70).

Through Latin poetics, alliteration, the figure of polyptoton, and the use of words with multiple meanings (*stigmatē* and *numeroso*), Donne has signaled that his body is a book. Not only does the Latin provide multiple meanings simultaneously, which English versions can do only through translating the same passage twice, the Latin text allows him to turn his ideas into action through the syntactic arrangement of the words on the page. The Latin enacts and embodies Donne’s thought, in this passage of “Stationes” and in “De Libro cum mutuaretur,” to be considered below, making Donne’s body into a book.

Also reflecting his concerns of bodily dispersal and reunion of soul and body, Donne’s correspondence even portrays a fantasy of being resurrected through letters.<sup>32</sup> Targoff documents that Donne deliberately chose not to date his letters.<sup>33</sup> Gerard Passannante, citing a discussion with Marshall Grossman, has called attention to Donne’s letter to a friend, when Donne was worried that his letters might not arrive in proper sequence: “If our letters come not in due order, and so make not a certain and concurrent chain, yet if they come as atoms, and so meet at last by any crooked and causal application, they make up and they nourish bodies of friendship.”<sup>34</sup> In one sense, the reading of correspondence not in chronological order is analogous to Latin sentence structure, where the cases of nouns and adjectives and the endings of verb, not the sequence of the words, determine the meaning, so that the individual words can be written more flexibly. The scattering of letters that come “not in due order” is also analogous to the dispersal of bodily remains after death.

Donne’s elaboration of the metaphor of the body as a book finds its major expression in his Latin poem, “De Libro cum mutuaretur” [literally, “Concerning the book, when it was lent”].

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<sup>32</sup> Targoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-27, 45-48.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Donne, *Letters*, 1:305-306, cited in Passannante (2011), p. 7.

The poem is a letter addressed to a Dr. Andrews, to whom Donne had lent a book. Dr. Andrews's children, however, had torn the book into pieces, but Dr. Andrews then arranged to reconstitute the book as a handwritten manuscript, which was afterwards given to Donne. Donne composed this Latin poem *circa* 1612. It was first printed in 1635 as a 22-line poem in elegiac couplets. It also appears as a 22-line poem in *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. by E.K. Chambers.<sup>35</sup> In a 1912 edition of Donne's poems, however, the editor Herbert J. C. Grierson removed lines 3-4 (*Transiit ... revehente meat*) from the poem itself and transposed them to a separate epigram at the end of the poem, ostensibly because the lines did not make sense to him. While most collections of Donne's poetry omit his Latin poems, those editions that do include the Latin poems tend to print "De Libro cum mutuaretur" with Grierson's emendation removing these two lines; e.g., as in Bennett's 1942 edition.<sup>36</sup> Since the poem was written as a personal letter it is understandable that it contains allusions that are meaningful to the recipient, but which remain obscure for later readers; this does not justify removing such lines from the body of the poem. Separating the two lines makes "De Libro" a 20-line poem. In contrast, as Frost has argued, twenty-two was often used as a structural element in English devotional literature of the time.<sup>37</sup> Twenty-two was the number of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the number of books in Jerome's Latin Vulgate edition of the Old Testament.<sup>38</sup> Further associations of the number 22 with religious poetry occur in Psalm 119 (Vulgate edition: Psalm 118), which consists of 22 groups of 8 verses, in St. Augustine's commentaries on this Psalm, which connected the number 22 with Christ,<sup>39</sup> and in the division of Augustine's *The City of God* into 22 books. The Old Testament *Lamentations*, in addition, consists of five books, each divided into 22 parts based on the Hebrew

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<sup>35</sup> Donne (1896).

<sup>36</sup> For example, Donne (1942), p 281.

<sup>37</sup> Frost, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> Jerome (391).

<sup>39</sup> Augustine (1888/c. 392-417), pp. 560-588.

alphabet. Donne himself had written a metrical English paraphrase of *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, with each of the five chapters divided into 22 numbered quatrains. Donne often cited the *Psalms, Lamentations*, and Saint Augustine, and was well aware of the Hebrew Biblical precedent of division of a religious work into 22 parts. Donne had stated that he wanted to write in a language closest to that of God, who spoke in Hebrew.<sup>40</sup> Donne's "Stationes," in addition, contains 22 lines.

The two lines removed by Grierson make reference to the Main River, the Seine, the city Frankfurt and the *aedes* of the victor (*victoris in aedes*). The poem as a whole concerns the superiority of a manuscript to a printed version, so that the above references are probably to the printing centers located along the Main River, including Frankfurt. Garrod understands *victoris in aedes* to be the house (*aedes*) of Dr. Andrewes, perhaps located on the Seine River in Paris; Dr. Andrewes's manuscript is the conqueror of the printed book sellers.<sup>41</sup> In view of the veneration Donne given to the manuscript, I interpret *aedes* as "shrines," one of its standard Latin meanings.

There are further areas of ambiguity. Donne's word for Frankfurt, *Francofurtum*, neuter in gender, might be in either the nominative or the accusative case, and so either the subject or the object of the verb in its clause. Chambers, in his 1896 edition of Donne's poems, states that the "letters v. D. D. may perhaps be interpreted as v[iro] D[edit] D[edicavit] or v[iro] D[edit] D[onne]." <sup>42</sup> We can translate this as "he gave and dedicated this to the man," or "Donne gave this to the man." Garrod, in contrast, translates the abbreviation as v[iro] D[omino] D[octori], "to the gentleman (literally, to the Lord man) Doctor."<sup>43</sup> Although Grierson does not provide an

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<sup>40</sup> Webber, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup> Garrod (1945), p 41.

<sup>42</sup> Donne, ed. Chambers (1896), Book II, Note 30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

English translation, Bennett prints one, as do H. W. Garrod in a 1945 article,<sup>44</sup> and Edmund Blunden in a 1955 paper.<sup>45</sup> These three English translations appear to me to be either excessively loose or very stilted. Here is the Latin text, with its prose introduction. I have provided my own English translation, which follows.<sup>46</sup>

### **De Libro cum mutuaretur:**

#### IMPRESSO, DOMI A PUERIS FRUSTRATIM LACERATO, ET POST REDDITO MANUSCRIPTO

Doctissimo Amicissimoque v. D. D. Andrews

Parturiunt madido quæ nixu præla recepta;  
Sed quæ scripta manu sunt, veneranda magis.  
Transiit in Sequanam Mœnus; victoris in ædes,  
Et Francofurtum, te revehente meat. 4  
Qui liber in pluteos, blattis, cinerique relictos,  
Si modo sit præli sanguine tinctus, abit,  
Accedat calamo scriptus, reverenter habetur,  
Involat et veterum scrinia summa patrum. 8  
Dicat Apollo modum; pueros infundere libro  
Nempe vetustatem canitiemque novo.  
Nil mirum, medico pueros de semine natos,  
Hæc nova fata libro posse dedisse novo. 12  
Si veterem faciunt pueri, qui nuperus, annon  
Ipse pater, juvenem, me dabit arte, senem?  
Hei miseris senibus; nos vertit dura senectus  
Omnes in pueros, neminem at in juvenem. 16  
Hoc tibi servasti præstandum, Antique Dierum,  
Quo viso, et vivit, et juvenescit Adam.  
Inter ea, infirmæ fallamus tædia vitæ,  
Libris, et cœlorum æmulâ amicitia. 20  
Hos inter, qui a te mihi redditus iste libellus,  
Non mihi tam carus, tam meus, ante fuit. 22

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (1945), pp. 38-42.

<sup>45</sup> Blunden (1955), pp. 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> My English translation of Donne's *De Libro cum mutuaretur* is greatly indebted to discussions with Judith P. Hallett, Professor of Classics, University of Maryland, College Park.

Donne utilizes the classic meter for Latin elegiac couplets, in which the first line is a rapid dactylic hexameter and the second line is a rather slower pentameter, actually two half-pentameters, with a strong diaresis (a pause at the end of a metrical foot, in contrast to a caesura, a pause within a foot) between the two halves.<sup>47</sup> In line with the classical practice, trochees can be substituted for dactyls in most feet, and the pentameter line is always indented.

*To my most learned and most friendly Doctor Andrews,  
Concerning a printed book, when it was lent it  
was torn to pieces at home by his children without any reason,  
and afterwards given back to me as a handwritten manuscript.*

Things to which printing presses give birth in wet labor are welcomed,  
     But those written by hand must be the most greatly revered.  
 The River Main gives precedence to the Seine; with you returning,  
     Even Frankfurt proceeds to the shrines of the victor. 4  
 A book would vanish into the shelves, left for moths and dust,  
     If it has been colored by the blood of the printing press.  
 Instead, if what has been written by pen approaches, regarded with reverence  
     It flies to the loftiest bookcases of the ancient fathers. 8  
 Let Apollo tell the manner how children can truly pour  
     Venerable age and grey hair into a new book.  
 It's no wonder that children born from a physician's seed  
     Are able to have given a new destiny to a new book. 12  
 If children can make old that which is brand-new,  
     Will their father by his art, give me, an old man, youth?  
 Alas for wretched old men! Harsh old age turns us all  
     Into children, but turns no one into the prime of youth. 16  
 Ancient of Days, you have kept for yourself this skill which must be preferred:  
     After seeing you, Adam lives and grows youthful.  
 Meanwhile, let us deceive the weary moments of sickly life  
     With books and with a friendship rivaling heaven-dwellers. 20  
 Among all these books, that little book you restored to me  
     Has never before been so dear, so much my own. 22

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<sup>47</sup> Garrison, 1989, p. 173.



Donne relates the manuscript, restored from the torn-out pages of the printed book to the power of God, the Ancient of Days, who alone can restore life and rejuvenate dead bodies. The new manuscript (*libro ... novo*) is worthy of being treated with reverence, and has characteristics of the prime of youth (*novo*), with “venerable age and grey hair.” Christopher Ricks has noted that there “survives only one interesting critical statement by Donne” about metrical poetry, from *Sermons* 6:41.<sup>48</sup> Ricks quotes:

And therefore it is easie to observe, that in all Metricall compositions, ... the force of the whole piece, is for the most part left to the shutting up; the whole frame of the Poem is a beating out of a piece of gold, but the last clause is as the impression of a stamp, and that is it that makes it currant.

The last two lines of “De Libro” explicitly link the poem to Donne’s concern about dispersal of bodily parts and his hope for reunion of soul and body:

“Among all these books, that little book you restored to me  
Has never before been so dear, so much my own.” (lines 21-22).

Only after the book is given to him as a hand-written, reconstituted manuscript does it become so much his own. Similarly, Ramie Targoff reads the “Sermon on Job 19.26” as arguing that “it is not until we are resurrected that we shall really experience what it feels like to be perfectly ourselves.”<sup>49</sup> The homily concludes: “I cannot say, you cannot say so perfectly, so entirely now as at the Resurrection, *Ego*, I am here; I, body and soul.”<sup>50</sup> The desire to become perfectly oneself may also relate to literary immortality, after the writer’s works are gathered together and understood more comprehensively. The French poet Stéphane Mallarmé provides a modern echo in the first line of his 1877 tribute to Edgar Allan Poe, “Le Tombeau d’Edgar Poe” [“The Monument/Tomb of Edgar Poe”]:

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<sup>48</sup> Ricks (1988), p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Targoff, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Donne, *Sermons*, 3:110.

“Tel qu’en Lui-même enfin l’éternité le change”<sup>51</sup>

“Into what is perfectly Himself, eternity transforms him at last” [*translation mine*].

In Donne’s comparison of the restoration of the book to the reunion of body and soul after the resurrection of the dead, he not only states the content of his thought in Latin, he uses Latin syntax itself to illustrate his point. Lines 9-10 read:

*pueros infundere libro  
Nempe vetustatem canitiemque novo.*

The phrase *libro ... novo* spans two separate lines, *libro* (“book,” ablative case) ending line 9, and the word *novo* (“new,” ablative case) ending line 10. Within these two words, into a “new ... book,” the “children can truly pour/ Venerable age and grey hair.” Structurally, the pouring occurs totally within *libro* and *novo*. Once again this is *syntactic enactment*, word placement mirroring the sense of what is stated.<sup>52</sup>

There are classical antecedents, known to Donne, for the creation of a book from scattered components. In 1579 Sir Thomas North had published the first volume of his English translation of Plutarch, including the “Life of Lycurgus.” North’s *Plutarch* was widely known in England, utilized by such authors as Shakespeare. In the “Life of Lycurgus,” Plutarch credits the Spartan lawgiver with gathering together scattered sheets of Homer’s epics and bringing the work as a whole into Greece, thus making Homer immortal. Although there are other accounts of Homeric editing and its recension from oral into written form, Donne was likely to be familiar with North’s translation, if not with the original Greek text of Plutarch. North writes:

It is very likely it was there [Ionia, in Asia Minor], where he first saw Homers works, in the hands of the heires and successours of Cleophylus: and finding in the same, aswell many rules of pollicie, as the great pleasure of Poets feigning, he diligently copied it out, and made a volume thereof to carie into Grece. It is true there was much fame abroad for

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<sup>51</sup> Mallarmé (1877/1949), pp. 610-611.

<sup>52</sup> Lateiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-237.

Homer's poetry among the Greeks, howbeit there were few of them brought together, but were scattered here and there in divers men's hands, in pamphlets and pieces unsewed [i.e., "unsewed"] and without any order: but the first that brought them most to light among men, was Lycurgus. (p. 124).<sup>53</sup>

The Greek word *North* translated as "scattered here and there" is *sporádēn*, an adverb meaning "in a scattered manner," "here and there." In reference to Homer's text, Passannante has also cited the importance for the Elizabethans and Jacobean (for example, Francis Bacon) of the collection of Homeric fragments, reconstituting Homer's corpus as new letters and syllables came to the library of Alexandria, and as Homer being reborn from the dust of the burning library.<sup>54</sup> Donne integrates the wish to gather dispersed components of his body with the production of a manuscript from scattered pages and with the historical process of compiling editions of Homer from geographically diffused remnants which made Homer immortal.

Throughout his life, John Donne had responded to crises and disasters by identifying himself with the metaphoric nature of God. A pervasive theme throughout all of his literary genres is a focus on the union of the body and the soul. He employs metaphors to examine and clarify reality and theological beliefs, and he uses "numbers," that is, the rhythms of poetry to address his emotions, doubts and fears. Donne's body is a book in which God has written God's own name. The power and extent of the metaphor of the body as a book become clearer through an examination of the Latin texts of "Stationes" and "De Libro cum mutuaretur." These poems highlight the metaphoric, theological, grammatical, metrical, and poetic significances of Donne's writings. Latin flexibility of word placement comes from the grammatical endings of nouns, adjectives and verbs, so that these indications of case, tense, and mood, and not the sequence of words in the clause, determine the meaning. Since individual words can be written and read in almost any order, Donne is able to use syntactic enactment to dramatize his wish for a restored

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<sup>53</sup> Plutarch (1579/1895), p. 124.

<sup>54</sup> Passannante, *op. cit.*, pp.152-153.

body, a body that is simultaneously venerable and in the prime of youth, so that “we shall really experience what it feels like to be perfectly ourselves.”

If children can reconstitute torn-out pages into a perfect manuscript, if Latin poetics and grammar can integrate scattered words into a text of profound meaning and beauty, then God can gather together dispersed body parts into the perfect union of body and soul. Let us return to Donne’s words, “I finde myself scattered.” We first construed this to mean: “I find that I am myself scattered.” We can now expand this as expressing Donne’s wish: “I have been scattered, but at the resurrection of the dead (and in my literary reception), I find that I am now united and am perfectly myself.” Donne engages with his lifelong fears of bodily separation through his mastery of the linguistic characteristics and poetic techniques of Latin poetry: its flexibility of word placement, advantage in providing multiple simultaneous meanings, and unique ability for syntactic enactment. God can transform his metaphors into reality. Donne seeks to become perfectly himself through his participation in what he calls God’s “majesty of the word” by developing, via Latin, the overarching metaphor of his body as a book.

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Master John Donne was born in London, in the year 1573, of good and virtuous parents: and, though his own learning and other multiplied merits may justly appear sufficient to dignify both himself and his posterity, yet the reader may be pleased to know that his father was masculinely and lineally descended from a very ancient family in Wales, where many of his.Â might give him a denomination; and began seriously to survey and consider the body of Divinity, as it was then controverted betwixt the Reformed and the Roman Church. John Donne's poetry is a curious mix of contradictions. At once spiritual and metaphysical, it is also deeply embedded in the physicality of bodies: love as a physical, corporeal experience as well as a spiritual high. His style can often be startlingly plain ("For God's sake hold your tongue", one of the poems on this list begins), yet his imagery is frequently complex, his use of extended metaphors requiring some careful unpacking. Here we've condensed the complete poetical works of John Donne into ten of his best-known and most celebrated poems. What is your favourite John Donne poem? And c