CHAPTER I. What Renaissance Poets Would Have Known


6. Origen, De Principiis, 3.4.2.


14. See chap. 4 of Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics* for a brief, authoritative presentation.

CHAPTER 2. Answers and Questions

1. I am quoting from an edition printed by John Field in 1662.
5. In his diary for March 23, John Manningham records information similar in spirit to Camden’s report. His entry for the 24th begins: “This morning about 3 at clocke hir Majestie departed this lyfe, mildly like a lambe, easily like a ripe apple from the tree, *cum leve quadam febre, absque gemitu*. Dr. Parry told me that he was present and sent his prayers before hir soule; and I doubt not but shee is amongst the royall saintes in heaven in eternall joyes.” A few days later he recorded solemn gossip about a ring from the Earl of Essex which the Queen wore to the day of her death, and this item: “It is certaine the Queene was not embowelled, but wrapt up in cere cloth, and that verry il to, through the covetousnes of them that defrauded hir of the allowance of clothe was given them for that purpose.” *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602–1603*, ed. Robert Parker Solien (Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1976), pp. 207, 208, 223.

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13. As one might expect, the accounts differ in some details. There seems to be agreement that there were two blows of the axe.


18. This is from *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, the myth of Pan. The text of the translation is quoted from Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *Works of Francis Bacon*, 13:99.


21. In *A Dialogue of Comfort* (pt. 3, chap. 25) More deals with panic terror in his fable of the hart and the bitch. The answer to the problem is the application of human reasoning, but supported by the necessary grace, which is available if we desire it.

CHAPTER 3. Donne's Pictures of the Good Death

1. Some of the following remarks were made July 10, 1977, in the Chelsea Old Church, in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Donne's sermon.

2. See Astrid Friis, *Alderman Cockayne's Project and the Cloth Trade* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1927).

3. No doubt such direct quotations touch the feelings of mourners in special ways, as Donne must surely have known. To a reader trying to be objective, the quotations are utterly undistinguished in their triteness. But objectivity is a questionable virtue here, asserting as it does a special privilege of detachment in order to clarify truth, while accepting as a necessary limitation the not-entering into the feelings of the occasion. One must also think that Donne's voice and person presenting those quotations would have given them a force that has faded on the page. Nevertheless, when Donne quoted Lady Danvers directly the difference is instructive. She always hurried her family and household to church “with that cheerful provocation, For God's sake let's go, For God's sake let's bee there at the Confession” (8:86). This too is for mourners, but the individual and characterizing words belong to the living family legend. They are not mustered as part of the evidence of a pious death.

4. There is a careful and inconspicuous reservation here, for Donne probably could not yet know whether all of the late financial supplements to the will would be carried out exactly. There is, however, no change in the emphasis upon
Cokayne's individual importance. Such emphasis, one may note in passing, owes little to the typological weight of "witnesses" (who have always counted in the traditions of rhetoric, oratory, and law), or to the volume of evidence that God was with him.


6. Faith placed wholly in a merciful God prevents every uncharitable interpretation. Thus, though we cannot trust any evidence that suggests the damnation of a dying man, "wee see often enough to be sory, but not to despaire" (10:240). Donne's faith, however, does not prevent him from entertaining unfavorable "evidence" when human interpretation of the "issue" seeks natural satisfaction in optimism. And so after he comments on our proclivity to comfort ourselves by the testimony that a friend "went away like a Lambe," he then adds a brief, grim, alternative interpretation of the apparently peaceful death: "But, God knowes, that may bee accompanied with a dangerous damp and stupefaction, and insensibility of his present state" (10:240).

CHAPTER 4. Respice Finem


2. Hebel and Hudson, p. 43; Ault, pp. 10–11.

3. Ault, p. 27.


5. Ault, pp. 491–92.


CHAPTER 5. Death in Earnest: "Tichborne's Elegy"

1. Hebel and Hudson, pp. 196–97; Ault, pp. 120–21. The poem first appeared in Verses of Praise and Joy written upon Her Majesty's Preservation, 1586. The title of the poem, apparently furnished by another hand, was Tychbornes Elegie, written with his owne hand in the Tower before his execution. There is no hard evidence that Chidiock Tichborne did write the poem attributed to him, but alternative possibilities have less to go on. His poem, published where it is, makes a special contribution to "Praise and Joy"—so special that it is short-lived.
in this sense. The poem becomes an exhibition of the private mental suffering of a convicted traitor, a member of the Babington conspiracy. The youth apparently made a favorable personal impression when he spoke before his execution. The standard mutilation, dismemberment, and protracted dying would have had the normal effect of celebrating without words the queen’s escape from danger and a ritualized victory over real enemies. At the same time there must have been some pathos felt, seeing an attractive, helpless youth ending his life in agony.

Alert to modern devices for gaining attention, one may note the calculated effect of written with his owne hand in the Tower. The appeal is not, however, any evidence of fraud. The same applies to “T. K’s” answer to Tichborne’s swan song (“in Cygneam Cantionem”). The aim of the answer is to ridicule by parody anything that might be taken seriously in Tichborne’s self-assessment. For example: “Thou soughtst thy death, and found it in desert. / Thou look’dst for life, yet lewdlie forc’d it fade.” The answer apparently did not destroy the appeal of Tichborne’s poem, which found its way into collections and song-books—for its own interest, one assumes, no longer a part of “Praise and Joy.”

2. I should add that I do not consider myself as having fully explained the lack of religious turn or development in the poem. It is obvious, I assume, that Tichborne’s papist loyalties were an important reason for his being recruited for the conspiracy. The letter he wrote his wife from prison contains, as one should expect, many expressions of religious hope and conviction. But in the poem religious thoughts do not emerge directly. What does this mean? We do not find in the poem, and I think we do not consciously miss, any thoughts based on the appointed sequence of events that will produce his death. Tichborne concentrates on the aspects of the subject he has chosen: life, death, and personal time. His mind was also engaged by all the details that were chosen to come together in a poem. That action—may one think?—expresses itself by orderly and other procedures devised along the borders of consciousness, such as between life and death.

No one should expect the interpretation of a poem to explain everything. Tichborne does not mention in the poem any physical details of the death to come; he could scarcely have been unaware of or uninterested in them. Surely, opening his mind to that scene would have interfered mightily with the poem that was taking shape. My interpretation, which is drawn from the materials of the poem and how they are put together, does not enter into other poems that he might perhaps have written. I do not therefore take up or reject the influence of Tichborne’s reasonable fear of the savage death he was to receive. There are strange pressures at the edges of the poem, and the concentration, however inspired, may also have served to keep unwanted thoughts at bay.

CHAPTER 6. Dying in Jest and Earnest: Raleigh

CHAPTER 7. Imagined Dyings: John Donne

1. For the numbering of the holy sonnets I follow Grierson. For the texts, except where mentioned, I quote from Helen Gardner's edition, The Divine Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). Numbers following the two excerpts from "Good Friday, 1613" on pp. 139 and 140 refer to lines.

2. The quoted words belong to Donne's technical vocabulary for expressing the Christological concept of kenosis.

3. The fading trail from Psalm 51 offers no direct invitation to think of Bathsheba and therefore Ann among "those loves," the "all" sacrificed in England, and those "false mistresses" of his ambitious youth. As one of many, Ann means very little in the poem; when we go behind the poem we have to write most of the story ourselves but are not encouraged to make due acknowledgments to the Muse. Having said this much, I turn to simple glossing. The obligation to love God entirely provides the basis for the imputed "jealousy" and has other, formal theological implications not directly applied. Man's unquiet heart, his intellectual endowment, and the urges of entireness are all illustrated in the following: "Grace is not grace to me, till it make me know that I have it... he hath given that soule an appetite, and a holy hunger and thirst to take in more of him; for I have no Grace, till I would have more" (Sermons, 8:250). Elsewhere he refers to the notion of "happy excess," felicitous intoxication, the holy desire that "begets a satiety," that "begets a farther desire" (5:275).

4. In retrospect, it seems more accurate to acknowledge that Donne is consciously allowing special room for common grief. Elsewhere he can write with fine discrimination about imprecation and deprecation and can criticize great men of God for going too far—as when he says of Moses and St. Paul, "There was, if not an irregularity, and an inordinatenesse, at least an insconsideration, not to be imitated by us now, not to be excused in them then" (5:329). R. C. Bald's John Donne: A Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 338–65, tells the facts of the diplomatic trip. They shed little light on the poem.

5. Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Expostulation 17, pp. 87–89.

6. "And therefore God seales his promises with a Quia, a reason, an assurance" (Sermons, 5:104).

CHAPTER 8. Entering the History of Death: George Herbert

1. All quotations from Herbert come from The Works of George Herbert, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941).

CHAPTER 9. "The Plaudite, or end of life"


2. Another possibility is that Herrick is writing his own special imitation of the death of Augustus, whose friends gathered around the bed were said to
have applauded him for having played his part in life so well. See Bacon, Selected Writings, p. 356.

CHAPTER 10. Introduction

1. Dedicatory sonnet to Raleigh.
3. Herbert, A Priest to the Temple, Hutchinson, p. 238.
4. The quotations, from Selected Writings, are from pp. 103, 22, and 20, respectively.
5. This is the opening line of the last elegy for Sidney in Astrophel, published in 1595 with Spenser’s Colin Clouts Come Home Again.

CHAPTER 11. Lament, Praise, Consolation: Pain/Difficulty, Ease


CHAPTER 12. The Death of a Loved One: Personal and Public Expressions

1. Astrophel, the contribution by “Clorinda,” lines 91–96. In his “Poem upon the Death of O. C.,” seven decades later, Marvell repeats the same message: “And in those joys dost spend the endlesse day, / Which in expressing, we ourselves betray” (lines 297–98).
2. Underwood, 14. In his “Elegie for Prince Henry,” Donne’s “hee is not dead, wee are” is well fortified against the literal meaning.
3. The epitaph appeared in the first edition of the Reliquae, with the signature “H. Wotton.” In a letter to John Dynely, November 13, 1628, Wotton includes a copy marked “Authoris Incerti” for the possible entertainment of the Queen of Bohemia, and “worth her hearing for the passionate plainness” (Life and Letters, L. P. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 2:34.) One assumes a necessary choice between the pleasure of applying a fine critical phrase to one’s own unacknowledged verses and the labor of producing a courteous apology for presuming to send a poor thing of one’s own.
4. My interpretation would separate “and my good is dead” from “and to hers.” The strained expression would then mean: “She has paid her debt to
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Nature, and to her own nature, and (all) my good is dead.” Helen Gardner’s annotation joins the two phrases: “Death ends the possibility of doing good to oneself or to another.” However reasonable this is, in effect it accepts a strained piece of language which seems to have little purpose other than to assert the obvious. In a subsequent printing of her volume, Professor Gardner has omitted the annotation quoted above. In his recent Everyman edition of Donne, C. A. Patrides and I seem to be in agreement.

5. The thirst and the desire to beg derive from God. I have quoted the illustrative text from *Sermons*, 8:250 in n. 3, Chap. 7.

6. Here I follow Grierson’s punctuation of the line, “Dost wooe my soule for hers; offering all thine.” The “for” I take to mean “for the sake of”; God’s offer of love quietly includes Ann and is a gracious act of divine love, not a form of compensation.


12. Lord Morley’s translation, ed. D. D. Carnicelli, p. 120.

CHAPTER 13. Episodes in the Progress of Death


4. Quarles’s claim of invention was made by attaching his two “original” stanzas to his *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629) under a title of lofty association, *Hos ego versiculos*.


CHAPTER 14. Preliminary Views


2. 3.4.176, 212; 5.1.187.
3. At the beginning of Chapter 4 of *Urne-Burial*, Sir Thomas Browne puts more directly attitudes like those Donne expresses in meditation: “Christians have handsomely glossed the deformity of death, by careful consideration of the body, and civil rites which take off brutal terminations. And though they conceived all reparable by a resurrection, cast not off all care of enterrment. For since the ashes of Sacrifices burnt upon the Altar of God, were carefully carried out by the Priests, and deposed in a clean field; since they acknowledged their bodies to be the lodging of Christ, and temples of the holy Ghost, they devolved not all upon the sufficiency of soul existence; and therefore with long services and full solemnities concluded their last Exequies” (*Selected Writings*, p. 141).

### CHAPTER 15. Thought and Images

3. Bacon demonstrates his effective assimilation of Aquinas’s thought on the subject: “Emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more” (*Selected Writings*, p. 299). Bacon seems to be unaware of the intrusion of “a devotional atmosphere” and “a concession to human weakness”—but that raises questions that are not helpful here.

### CHAPTER 16. Images of Reflection

5. Or response to objects signifying the threat of death, as in Traherne’s poem “Wonder,” where to the child’s innocent eye “Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds” are the enemies of Paradise.
6. Nancy Lee Beaty reports that a high proportion of Parsons’s revisions “heighten the fearfulness of the death scene itself” (p. 183).

### CHAPTER 17. Reasoning by Resemblances

2. Stoic usage made the language widely familiar. To quote a single exam-
ple, from Seneca's 26th epistle (bk. 3, no. 5): "Incommodum summum est, inquis, minui et deperire et, ut proprie dicam, liquescere. . . . Ecquis exitus est melior quam in finem suum natura solvente dilabi?"

3. As in Plotinus: “For all of the Soul that is in body is asleep and the true getting-up is not bodily but from the body . . . the veritable waking or rising is from corporeal things” (3.6.6: MacKenna's translation).


9. Quoted by Beaty, Craft of Dying, p. 175.


11. Henry King, “The Exequy” (p. 54) and “The Boyes answer to the Blackmoor” (p. 7).

12. My intention is only to illustrate a familiar human experience, that to someone in love everything else in the world may appear illusory.

13. Latham, p. 79.


15. Ault, p. 102.


CHAPTER 18. Intricacies

1. Letter 311 in Letters of Sigmund Freud, ed. Ernst L. Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 457. The letter was dated December 27, 1938, and was written to Rachel Berdach (Bardi), a German writer born in Budapest, 1878. At the time of Freud's letter she would have been sixty years old.


6. Edward Lord Herbert's death as reported by Aubrey is a case in point: “James Usher, Lord Primate of Ireland, was sent for by him, when in his death-bed, and he would have received the sacrament. He sayd indifferently of it, that if there was good in any-thing 'twas in that, or if it did no good 'twould doe no hurt. The Primate refused it, for which many blamed him. He then turned his head to the other side and expired very serenely” (Brief Lives, ed. Oliver L. Dick [London: Secker & Warburg, 1949], p. 135). Aubrey’s account, which makes its own disarming claim on art and legend, is breathtakingly different from the art that
narrated the death of Edward's mother. The two decades that separate the death of Magdalen, pictured by Donne, and that of Edward, as reported by Aubrey, seem to belong to two different eras. But no less strange: from the perspective of a century later and the deathbed of Voltaire, how modest is the sense of scandal, especially when blame is distributed in the account, and there is besides the stumbling block of his having died "serenely." But then Herbert had not yet been identified as a "father" of deism. Clearly, there was much more eager attention to the sensational business of Rochester's conversion and death.

7. See, for instance, Enneads 4.4.35 and 6.8.4; Hooker, Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, 1.7.3: "Neither is any other desire termed properly will, but that where reason and understanding, or the show of reason, prescribeth the thing desired."

8. Sermons, 10:240–41. He continues, p. 241: it is not "the last word nor gaspe that qualifies the soule. Stil pray wee for a peaceable life against violent death, and for time of repentance against sudden death, and for sober and modest assurance against distempered and diffident death." He cites the case of Samson, "subject to interpretation hard enough. Yet the holy Ghost hath moved S. Paul to celebrate Sampson in his great Catalogue, and so doth all the Church."

9. A useful commentary is the opening of Donne's sermon on the penitential Psalm 6 (5:364–65). There he speaks of the nature of earnest prayer, which admits importunity, and even "impedance" and violence.


17. In the English Renaissance thoughts of personal annihilation receive little entertainment, as if such thoughts were a vicious residue of paganism. Good words for Epicurus are not frequent. Sir Thomas Browne, however, defends him as "the virtuous heathen, who lived better than he spake," though there is an admitted possibility of his "erring in the principles of himself." (Urne-Burial, p. 147). Still, he deserved better treatment than he received from Dante, for "Among all the Set, Epicurus is most considerable, whom men make honest without an Elyzium, who contemned life without encouragement of immortality, and making nothing after death, yet made nothing of the King of terrours" (p. 146). In his early, full essay on death (1.20), Montaigne heaps up the quotations from Lucretius. At the end of the essay there are eleven, punctuated by a quotation from Manilius and one from Virgil. One imagines that Mon-
taigne was amusing himself by surprising some of his readers with the solid morality contained in the writing of a highly suspect author.


21. The manuscript of his book Biathanatos, which he did not want to publish or to destroy.


CHAPTER 19. The End

1. Selected Writings, p. 283.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to The Hour of Our Death.

3. The kinds of evidence taken up have different phases of intensity and decline. For instance, the height of interest in the death of the individual may have occurred from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries and may have lasted longer in places like New England. Still: “Beginning with the eleventh century a formerly unknown relationship developed between the death of each individual and his awareness of being an individual. Today it is agreed that between the year 1000 and the middle of the thirteenth century 'a very important historical mutation occurred’” (Western Attitudes toward Death, p. 51).

5. As in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle*.
7. “The tears of a lackey, the distribution of my old clothes, the touch of a well-known hand, a commonplace phrase of consolation, make me disconsolate and sorry for my self.”
8. Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (London, 1652), 4.3.179. Subsequent citations will be made in the text; the numbers refer to chapter, section, and page.
9. This is not a matter to argue in passing, and the record in print is always incomplete, and there are many harsh voices proclaiming the higher mercy, but the Renaissance is notable for the learned spokesmen who can argue for human good and felicitously draw reasoning from the usage of common kindness. I think of Robert Burton, and not only the section of his book entitled “Religious Melancholy.” But I draw my single illustration from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, where he is reviewing the present state of medicine. He criticizes physicians (among many specific deficiencies) for not seeking the skill and taking the care to lessen “the pains and agonies of death.” This, as well as the restoration of health, ought to be part of “the office of a physician,” to enable a patient “to make a fair and easy passage.” He cites famous testimony, the same that Montaigne used, Augustus Caesar’s wishing for himself “that same *Euthanasia*.” He goes on to note the successful example of a much-admired ancient, “which was specially noted in the death of Antoninus Pius, whose death was after the fashion and semblance of a kindly and pleasant sleep.” In this matter, the recommendation of emperors cannot be imagined as excluding general interest (Selected Writings, p. 277).
12. I am thinking of Primo Levi, that patient man, venting his indignation at a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz, an old Jew named Kuhn who found himself not on the list of those chosen to die, and who that night raised his voice in praise to God for his deliverance. A probable indecorum between grateful man and silent God is different from the gross indecorum heard by fellow men, some of whom, also having been spared, are in a position to feel some released emotions. In *Prisoners of Hope* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 79, H. Stuart Hughes notes Levi’s “sudden breakthrough of passionate revulsion,” questions it, and strives to produce an adequate explanation. And yet, whatever the reason, a marvelous patience is here broken through: sensitive, alert, mysteriously good-humored, believably durable.
17. I have taken the liberty of disregarding the fourth stanza, which deflects the imaginative action toward the practical present of the immediate stage. The naivety given a dramatic voice in the lyric is one part of the strangeness and the sense of matters unresolved or but partly voiced. One is not, I think, likely to be satisfied by the simple message, taken straight, of the naivety. A poem written only twenty-five years earlier, “Tichborne’s Elegy,” expresses a naive wonder that is not intended as the dramatic projection of an attitude. But there are similarities between that poem and Shakespeare’s “Dirge.” The sense of strangeness and reserve in Shakespeare’s lyric has its counterpart in the way the inventory of untrustworthy aspects of existence in the world creates, in “Tichborne’s Elegy,” a momentum that seems to lead toward an opening into familiar religious expression but does not do so.
19. Having made a particular point and having suggested some distant relationships, I have a few further, respectful comments to add. Thomas offers fascinating examples of the body as unwilling host countering intruders with so much zeal that the defense threatens to become fatal to the host. What Donne wrote of Elizabeth Drury, “That one might almost say, her bodie thought,” seems like a prophecy, one that would have amazed Donne. For in responding to some infections, the body seems to show intelligence and will. Indeed, out of Thomas’s examples a moderately resourceful theologian might make a new kind of case for free will, for individual responsibility for one’s own errors, and perhaps for the presence of sin as excess.

Thomas develops another line of thought that will interest readers who have reached this page. He quotes Montaigne’s pleasant experience when, after a riding accident, he thought he was dying, letting himself slip away gently and easily; “I hardly ever did anything with less of a feeling of effort.” Thomas then cites the memoirs of David Livingstone, the famous explorer of Africa, who was nearly killed by a lion but felt only peaceful calm all the time he was in the lion’s jaws. And then, as if to counter centuries of belief in the unnatural pain of the last agony, Thomas quotes a medical authority of splendid credentials and many years spent in hospitals:

Sir William Osler, who must have seen a great many people die in his time, was quite firmly convinced about this. There was, he maintained, no such state as an agony of death—he had never seen it. (p. 219)

I am pleased to end this note with the reference to Sir William Osler, who, in addition to his more widely known accomplishments, was a learned reader in the period of English literature I have been drawing upon.