

"Jack" and "Doctor" Donne

Modern-Day Biographers' Image of John Donne

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Next to Shakespeare, John Donne is the best loved and best known writer of the English Renaissance. As with Shakespeare, the figure of Donne is also surrounded by myths. We know a lot more about Donne than we do about Shakespeare, but in Donne's case the various biographical information has in some ways contributed to a mythmaking around his person. As this thesis argues, the image that exists of Donne in the popular imagination today is very much a product of Sir Izaak Walton's biography: *The lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert* (1670) (hereafter *Lives*). Whereas the 1670 version of the biography will be used in this thesis, it originally appeared in 1639, in a period that was still only in the process of discovering the differences between fact and fiction. The present thesis is devoted to exploring how Walton's views on Donne and the myth of Donne have been handed down through literary histories produced in the twentieth century. Even in Norway, the image that we have of John Donne today is very much shaped by Walton. This thesis is the first to investigate our present-day ideas about Donne, who has been subject to an increased interest in recent years, mainly thanks to the Norwegian author and composer-pianist Ketil Bjørnstad, and the poet and translator Åsmund Bjørnstad, whose selection of Donne's poetry was translated as "Eit menneske er inga øy" ("No man is an island") in 2010. Ketil Bjørnstad has set music to the poetry of Donne, and in describing his relationship to Donne's literature he states that "Donne's dramatic life is reflected in the texts, and in them rests a source of passion and music". Even King Harald has quoted Donne in his New Years Eve speech in 2008. I shall return to this towards the end of my thesis.

It is easily understandable that there have been changing views on the views and reception of an author, bearing in mind the different theoretical approaches to looking at literature we have witnessed throughout literary history. This ranges from traditional historical-biographical criticism to the kind of author studies we see today. Poetry can often be said to reflect and reflect upon lived experience as well as the historical context in which it originally appeared. However, it is important to distinguish between the real author John Donne, who lived from 1572 to 1631, and the author that is represented in the text. Catherine Bates, Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at Peterhouse, Cambridge, also seeks to highlight this supposed division in her forthcoming article "Sexuality" (in *Donne in Context*). What tends to happen, for example in "A Hymn to God the Father" and "The Good Morrow", is that we are encouraged to identify Donne the man with the various speakers in the poems. This way of looking at literature was common in

the early modern age, but the pendulum has swung, and from our perspective such autobiographical readings of literature appear out-dated.

Furthermore, where people turn to acquire information about an author like John Donne can be counted as a part in the myth-making around him. The Internet, with its advantages and disadvantages, is the primary source of information today. If you do an online search with the keywords “John Donne”, the first webpage you encounter is Wikipedia. How do Wikipedia and similar webpages mention him, and what kind of focus do they have? People tend to read only the introductory paragraphs on web-pages like this, and there is no doubt that the information provided by Wikipedia forms the basis for what people in general learn and know about Donne. This is of course not unique for John Donne, but it can nevertheless contribute to a myth around him as person and poet. As this thesis argues, there is a need to investigate and reflect upon what kinds of aspects that tend to be emphasized on web pages which serve to give us information about a specific topic.

How did Donne himself – through letters, written sermons, and surviving notes – contribute to the image created around him? First of all, one has to consider how his works were read and by whom. Secondly, as Donne grew older, he increasingly became aware of who he was and how he wanted to be perceived. Research has shown, for example, that after his ordination when he began preaching as Dean of St Paul’s, Donne became more aware of how to behave and speak so as not to offend anyone. There has been an increasing awareness the last fifty years, that the real author not necessarily should be identified with the “I” speaking in the literary text. Furthermore, there has also been a growing understanding of the author as participating in a literary system of text production and dissemination. A course offered at the University of Oslo in 2010 was provocatively titled “The Return of the Author”. According to the course description, “The so-called “return to history” of the last few decades within Anglo-American literary theory and scholarship – be it in the form of New Historicism, Feminism, Gay and Queer Studies, Post-colonial studies or the history of the book – has also meant a “return to the author”, albeit in new ways” (ENG 4471). It is my contention, however, that much of what is written about John Donne still reflects an out-dated view of authorship, focusing mostly on biographical details. I am not referring to the status of Donne scholarship in general, but rather to the way in which biographers continue to read Donne as if his works were direct reflections of his personal life, often identifying his poetic speakers with Donne the man. Today we see that people tend to focus on given aspects of an author’s life when reading literature, not least observable in online resources, newspapers and reviews, and this contributes to a “mythifying” way of reading literature, and

therefore also a contribution to the myth-making surrounding canonical authors such as Donne. This mythified way of reading literature is probably due to how we learn to read literature in elementary school, where teachers – unconsciously or not – try to see aspects of a literary text in relation to the author’s life. It is therefore important to consider how and why the reception of Donne’s works and his reputation as a writer have changed throughout history, and why the popular image of Donne has turned out the way it has.

1.1 Overview of material

Walton’s biography will serve as a primary source of reference, and I will also show how modern biographies to a far too great extent have leaned on Walton’s account of Donne, including R. C. Bald’s *John Donne: A Life* (1970), John Carey’s *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1990), and John Stubbs’ *John Donne, the Reformed Soul* (2007). In the shorter chapter on Donne’s modern-day reputation in Norway, Åsmund Bjørnstad’s introduction to his translation of Donne’s poems will be used as primary source. These will be seen in relation to what has been written about Donne in later years by using secondary literature which concerns the reception of Donne – both in the international context as well as the national context in Norway – and elaborate about the topic of surviving myths and views on his authorship. In this sense, then, one has to consider and evaluate critical reception of Donne from the time when he started writing, through the seventeenth-, eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth centuries. Views on his authorship have changed; ranging from the view that he was “dull as an ass” in the eighteenth century, to his being declared a genius in the nineteenth century. Further, as already mentioned, I want to maintain an emphasis on surviving myths and views by referring to critics who have helped establish and support these views, from Ben Jonson and John Dryden, to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and T. S. Eliot. In addition to (briefly) discussing literary criticism from the mentioned centuries, it will also be especially important for me to show what the development in the twentieth- and twenty-first century has been, remembering that it is the main goal of the thesis to demonstrate how modern biographies have developed the image of Donne. This will be achieved by reading literary criticism from different periods in the twentieth century, and the later literary criticism will involve, among others, articles from *Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (2011, ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester) and *Cambridge Companion to John Donne* (2006, ed. Achsah Guibbory). The discussion of Donne’s reputation throughout history will be based mainly on A. J. Smith’s *John Donne- The Critical Heritage* (1975), which is a book

with references and extracts from commentators and critics concerning the reception of Donne's works and his poetic reputation from the sixteenth- to the twentieth century.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives

As this thesis wants to investigate the mythmaking surrounding Donne in biographies, and my purpose is to further elaborate and discuss the pervading emphasis on biographical details from the poet's life, the landmark essays "The Death of the Author" (1967) by Roland Barthes, and "What is an Author" (1969) by Michel Foucault may serve as theoretical background. Ever since the publication of the watershed arguments in these two articles, scholars have tended to regard writers as part of a literary system rather than as solitary geniuses. These two articles assess how the traditional historical-biographical criticisms fail on some points, and they focus more on the kind of author studies we see today, which studies the figure of the author in relation to the system of book production, circulation, and reception, which without doubt is relevant when discussing Donne's authorship.

Barthes' article, written in 1967, primarily aims to explain why one should avoid reading literature as if the author of the given (literary) text is speaking. He furthermore states that the idea of pinpointing who has written the piece became more important as the economical reasons for entering such an occupation became more interesting (126). This fact has led to the notion that people no longer should identify the speaker of the literary text with the real author. However, Barthes seeks to grant the reader more freedom: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture [...] To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text" (128). Furthermore, he states that the "I" in a text is a linguistic tool rather than exposing the poet's own feelings and experiences: "[...] language knows a "subject", not a person" (127). At the time he wrote his article, most readers of literary texts were influenced by the traditional way of reading and analysing literature. Remembering this, his article was, if not revolutionary, at least emphasizing the turn away from the Author. The conclusion of his article seems a bit harsh, but is nevertheless important: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (130).

Foucault's article, appearing two years later than that of Barthes, emphasized that the focus on the author in the history of literary criticism has produced unnatural and mythological views on the authors. At the same time, however, Foucault sees the need for an actual name of an author on a literary text because the person who writes a text is legally responsible for the published material. That is not to say that his views conclude in the fact

that the “I” in the literary text is the same as the author writing the piece of literature (Foucault 237-238). However, he sees to a greater extent the need for a poet’s name on the text, not just because of the legal aspect of the published material, but also the economical claims an author may demand after the publishing. As we shall see later in this thesis, poets in the age of Donne did not possess ownership over their texts after publishing, and this is one of the points that Foucault stresses.

Although the pivotal articles written by Foucault and Barthes will not be subject to further discussion in this thesis, they may serve as a backdrop for my investigation of the myth of John Donne. Both of them state, in some way or another, that reading literature as autobiographical is meaningless. The fact that people tend to read poems and other kinds of literature as if they were autobiographical, is, in my opinion, a result of how literature is taught at school. We do not learn, for example, that there is a difference between the speaker of the poem and the actual author. A book used at technological and industrial production in the first grade at vocational upper secondary school has Langston Hughes’ poem “Dreams” on the curriculum. One of the assignments after reading the poem is: “Who do you think the *poet* speaks to, in this poem? And what does he [*the poet*] compare life to, when dreams die or go?” (Langseth 40-41) (italics added). I know from my own experience with teaching this poem in class, that young pupils may have difficulties in understanding the distinction between the poet speaker and the author, Langston Hughes. This was further substantiated when I taught another poem, “Nice Ass” by Jesse Cameron Alick, in class (Langseth 81). One of the assignments was to discuss whether they thought it was a girl or a boy speaking in the poem. Immediately, they started using Google to find out more about the author. As they found out that it was a man who had written the poem, they were no longer in doubt: the speaker of the poem had to be a man. This example substantiates my claim that young pupils in Norway do not learn how to properly read literature, knowing that the content of this poem clearly suggests that the speaker of the poem is a girl. Furthermore, it was not until I entered university that I became aware that a different approach to literature exists, than what I had been taught throughout secondary- and upper secondary school in Norway. Therefore, a shift in the way that literature is taught in mandatory school needs to take place, reflecting the developments that have taken place in literary studies in general. Those wanting to study literature at university level, then, will be better prepared to face the complexities of literary scholarship and research.

1.3 Overview of thesis

To be able to present the whole picture of Donne's reception throughout history will of course demand more space than what a thesis like this allows. However, to prove my point and discuss different aspects of him, a brief overview of the reception of Donne throughout history is essential. As one of the most important ideas in this thesis is to find and discuss how Donne's contemporaries received him as a poet – in addition to see how these aspects are emphasized in biographies – only the most central critics and criticisms will be highlighted. These evidences will be investigated and examined by first exploring and discussing the young and wild “Jack Donne” who is often characterized as a love poet – chapter two –, before the focus shifts to “Doctor Donne”, the religious writer, in chapter three. In other words, the thesis will contrast, compare and discuss the “immature Donne” in relation to the “mature Donne”, who was granted a doctor's degree by the University of Cambridge after a royal command in 1615, and Donne became Doctor in Divinity the same year (Bald 307-308). Furthermore, how the views on the “two Donnes” have developed, survived and been subject for criticism will also be an important aspect of the thesis. In a separate, shorter chapter – chapter four–, I discuss the image of Donne in the popular imagination in Norway today, which, to my knowledge, has not been done in any previous thesis or study. Furthermore, to be able to describe and show if the alleged myth lives on, literary criticism from different periods of the twentieth century will be considered. Additionally, I want to maintain a strong emphasis on how biographers affect the image we have of Donne today.

2 “Jack Donne”- The Love Poet

In this chapter I shall elaborate on and discuss the early writings of John Donne, and this chapter will especially emphasize Donne’s reception, his preferment of manuscript circulation, his love poetry. Additionally, the impact of Izaak Walton’s account of Donne: *The Life of Dr. John Donne, late Dean of St Paul’s Church, London* (1675) will be highlighted. It has been underlined that there is a difference between the young and immature John Donne – “Jack Donne” – and the older and more mature John Donne, Doctor in Divinity. This is, for example, highlighted in Douglas Bush’s book *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century- 1600-1660* (1948), and John Stubbs’ *John Donne- The Reformed Soul* (2007) (Bush 303, Stubbs 4). Donne’s poetry has also typically been categorized in this sense: his earlier work is love poetry, and as he matures, the later poetry focuses more on social and religious issues. An exception from this typical division may be Donne’s *Satires*, which, according to Parfitt, predates his marriage in 1601 (13). Izaak Walton’s biography of Donne has contributed strongly to the ideas about Donne that we have today, and this biography will be discussed in relation to the critical reception of Donne from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Influential biographies that have proven to be strongly influenced by Walton’s account will also be highlighted and discussed, hereunder what has been considered to be the scholarly biography written about Donne, namely the biography written by R. C. Bald (*John Donne: a life*, 1970), and furthermore John Carey’s *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1990). In addition, the mentioned biography by Stubbs will also be examined. Furthermore, the influential account of Donne written by James Winny will be used throughout the thesis (*A Preface to Donne*, 1973). These biographies and accounts, in my opinion, contribute to the myth-making around Donne. A part of this myth connects to how Donne circulated his early poetry, his attitudes towards printing, who his readers were, and what kind of implications this had for his writing and reception. Moreover, as I see it, these biographies also contribute to the old way of looking at poetry, namely to read personal experiences from the poet’s life into his work. Whereas one may have reasons to believe that that there were things happening in Donne’s life that affected both his style of writing and opinions on different aspects of society at the time, this does not imply that we as readers should approach his works in the manner of a traditional historical-biographical critic and interpret everything in his poems as relating to Donne’s personal experiences. To understand how these biographers have come to the conclusions they have, a starting point

for this discussion is to look at the aspects that are considered to make Donne so unique and “mythified”.

2.1 Readership, reputation, and reception among Donne’s contemporaries

Donne’s readership, contemporary reputation and reception have always been important when discussing his authorship, because these are aspects that have contributed to the myth around Donne throughout history. His preference of manuscript circulation and the circles he frequented have been used to substantiate some critics’ – for example Bald, Carey, Bush, and etcetera – claim that Donne was unique in almost every aspect of his authorship. The first chapter of this thesis seeks to disavow some of these claims, and also has as a main concern to show a general overview and discussion of Donne’s reception.

Donne, being raised in a Catholic family with a father who was a well-off merchant, went to university at a young age. More specifically, he and his brother Henry entered Hart Hall in Oxford in 1584, when they were respectively ten and eleven years old (Bald 42). Catholics at Donne’s time were experiencing severe limitations in choice of career, and being a practicing Catholic could be punished by public executions, something Donne witnessed at a young age (Bloom 10). There was no great phenomenon that young, Catholic boys matriculated to a university institution like this, but Hart Hall was something more than just a university institution; it was considered to be a centre for Catholics (Bald 43). This was where Donne first got the opportunity to make friends, friends who later became his first readers (Parfitt 13). In accordance with the general idea of what it meant to be a poet at the time, Donne preferred manuscript circulation to print publication (Pebworth 23). After Donne finished the university, his close circle of friends became men at the Inns of Court, where he found men of the same intellectual capacity, and men who shared the same interests as him (Parfitt 13). Given that he circulated his poetry mostly among friends, these friends may count as Donne’s first critics. Because of the way his poems were circulated in many different manuscripts before being published posthumously, the project of collecting, editing and dating Donne’s works has been difficult (Sullivan, “Modern Scholarly Editions” 66).

Parfitt argues that Donne wishes “to be seen as private in relation to the public world of print”, but that this fact cannot seduce the reader to think that this kind of writing is personal or intimate, despite how Donne himself emphasises the presentation of the ego (30).

This aspect of Donne's poetry can be sensed in "A Hymn to God the Father", where he encourages the reader to identify the speaker of the hymn with the real author, Donne the man. He achieves this by using puns on his own and wife's name as a rhetorical strategy: "When thou hast *done*, thou hast not *done* | for I have *more*". Whereas these two lines are repeated at the end of the first two stanzas, the lines "And, having done that, thou hast done; | I fear no more" appear in the third and final stanza, making a reference to his own last name, and his wife's maiden name, More (Greenblatt et al. 1418). Donne was a part of the Renaissance literary system, and wrote in accordance with this system, where rhetoric was an important aspect. However, examples like this have made readers of his poems encouraged – by Donne himself – to see Donne as the speaker as well as the writer of the poem. Why he does this is a question we cannot answer, except from the fact that we know that Donne was a self-conscious man, and wanted to be seen in a mystical way, according to Robert Ellrodt's introduction to his book *Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self*.

This desire can also be observed from what his earliest biographer writes: "Thus *variable*, thus *vertuous* was the Life; thus *excellent*, thus *exemplary* was the Death of this memorable man" (Walton 78). Even though this quotation concerns Donne's death, it serves to show us how his reputation, by some, was considered shortly after his death. Other features that have contributed to why he is considered unique are, for example, that his diction and vocabulary are often described as simple and "unpoetic" (Dryden); Donne's comparisons are usually based on science, learning, philosophy and cosmology rather than beautiful things in the nature; much of his argumentation in the poems is described as metaphysical, a term defined by Oxford English Dictionary as "based on abstract reasoning [and] transcending physical matter of the laws of nature"; and his verses frequently contain a ragged, uneven and irregular rhythm– the rhythm of the speaking voice (accentuation) (A. J. Smith 12, Winny 101, A. J. Smith 233). The last point can, for example, be observed in the first two lines of "The Sun Rising" (one of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*): "Busy old fool, unruly sun | Why dost thou thus". These aspects in Donne's poetry were firstly subject for criticism, but have, in later years, been subject for praise, and have served as reasons for why Donne has survived as one of the most famous poets from his time, even though he during his own lifetime mostly distributed his poetry mainly as manuscript circulations.

As was customary among poets at the time, Donne preferred manuscript circulation of his writings, either by writing letters to his friends, or passing his works on personally. Furthermore, his fellow companions at the Inns of Court shared the same idea about how to

publish their works (Roger Chartier 39, George Parfitt 13). Writers at the time had no real ownership of their poetry once it had been published, and traditionally there was also a tendency to dislike the publicity of print: writing for print publication was not considered a suitable occupation for a gentleman because print was seen as “a medium that perverted courtly literary values of privacy and rarity” (Chartier 39). According to J. W. Saunders, this phenomenon has come to be known as “the stigma of print” (150). However, this is no unique aspect of Donne’s authorship, but the preferment of manuscript circulation was the standard of the day.

Pebworth states that “Donne preferred known readers for his writings” and Arthur F. Marotti further writes that “He was genuinely afraid that his youthful recreational writings would embarrass him by getting to a wider audience” (Pebworth 23, Marotti 36). In *John Donne- The Critical Heritage. Volume I*, A. J. Smith argues that by keeping control of his readers, Donne ensured that his writings would never be passed on without his approval (3). However, at some point, as A. J. Smith further observes, “it was inevitable that their circulation should escape the poet’s control in the end” (3). During his own lifetime, only nine works were printed, of which six were individual sermons (Pebworth 24). When we consider the difference between the old and young John Donne, a parallel to what Freud writes about in his article can be observed (“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”). Among other things, Freud argues that a child and its “phantasies” are something that an adult might be ashamed about. Instead of embracing these phantasies, an adult might rather try to hide them (57). One might speculate as to whether this also applies to Donne, who suggested in a letter about *Biathanatos*, that the mature Donne, Doctor of Divinity, was not the same as the young and wild “Jack Donne” (this work will be further discussed later in the thesis). Donne thus created an idea, which has been taken up by later biographers and critics, that Donne changed from writing love lyrics in his youth, to religious and social issues in his later literary career.

Even though Donne did not have any problems to *sign* his poetry or letters, – as we see for example in *Biathanatos* – he did not want to be characterized as a professional writer. Poets at the time, including Donne, lived by the idea that the occupation of a professional poet did not suit the image of a gentleman (Stringer “Composition and Dissemination” 15). Parfitt argues that “Such diffidence is itself continuous with his attitudes to his secular poetry, with, that is, the feeling that serious people do not write poetry and that gentlefolk do not publish” (88). One may therefore question Carey’s argument that Donne’s professed attitudes towards his own writings were unique:

Donne is *singular* among English poets in that he never refers to his poetry except disparagingly. When he sends poems to friends he excuses them as “light flashes” or “evaporations” or a “ragge of verses” (...) The image of himself which he wished to encourage was that of a person for whom poetry was no more than a courtly accomplishment (...) This contempt for poetry, and for himself in the role of poet, was, it seems, another facet of Donne’s ambition (italics added) (56)

What we see in the quotations from Donne are conventional appeals to the reader’s good will. Yet, Carey’s discussion of them falls into the category of what I see as mythification. There was, as we have seen, an agreement among most of Donne’s friends that the occupation of a poet did not suit the image of a gentleman. In addition, the normal way of publishing was still manuscript circulation, not the printing press, and Donne was in no way singular in doing so. Printing was introduced in England in 1476, but manuscript circulation was still preferred at least well into the eighteenth century (Chartier 48). Pebworth writes that “[...] during the early modern period, manuscript publication was not a peripheral phenomenon or an inferior form of transmission, but was important in the commerce of disseminating texts and was considered *by many* – including John Donne – to be superior to print” (italics added) (23). The attitude which Carey describes as typical of Donne was actually typical of manuscript culture in general. This is not, as Carey proposes, unique for Donne. Apparently, Carey is eager to demonstrate how unique Donne was. Whereas this was true of very many aspects of Donne’s works, when it came to his manner of circulating his texts in manuscript and pretending they were of little worth, Donne was far from unique. His preferment of manuscript circulation had more to do with the general idea of poets at the time, rather, than, as will be argued, to keep his wife from seeing what the younger Donne had written.

Stubbs writes in his 2007 biography of Donne that “The elegies detailing and embellishing Donne’s earlier affairs, with their hard sexual bargains and bedside striptease, were likely to distress Ann if she knew they were getting around” (123). Stubbs makes it sound as if every elegy Donne wrote included a description of some personal, lived experience. As literary critics, we should know by now that this is not necessarily how literature works. Yet at the time when Donne wrote the elegies, literary criticism and theory had not yet developed to the same degree as we see today, and his contemporaries were likely to identify the author with the speaker of the poems, and maybe even to object against his

writing erotic elegies in the tradition of Ovid (Guibbory, “Erotic Poetry” 134-135). Aimed at a popular audience, Stubbs’ biography does not pretend to offer a scholarly review of Donne’s writings. Stubbs makes an attempt to offer some literary-criticism-like comments on some of Donne’s poems in different parts of the book, for example when he discusses Donne’s twentieth elegy (“Loves Warre”) and refers to troubles in Ireland. However, he furthermore makes an assumption which clearly links Donne with the speaker of the poem because he finds “evidence” in the elegy: “These lines suggest that Donne was nowhere near St Valery or Dieppe in the early months of 1598; that it was not him chatting with the gloomy Spanish captives on their trip to England [...]” (83). One can see from the provided quotation from Stubbs above, that he prefers the focus on how these writings might reflect Donne’s personal experiences and life. By doing so, his biography contributes to the myth surrounding Donne in the popular imagination. In my opinion, we should be critical of such narratives about an author’s life and work. If not, we may be led to treat non-academic material as if it gave a scholarly and authoritative image of the poet. As a teacher, I also find such popular biographies misleading in the sense that they may substantiate old ideas about how to read poetry and literature.

2.2 Reception throughout history

The first collection of Donne’s poetry was published posthumously in 1633. According to A. J. Smith, there is little to suggest that people at the time generally saw him as an extraordinary poet (11). He was well-known as Dean of St. Paul’s, but only one of the persons who wrote an elegy for him described Donne as something else than “[...] a great divine who expressed his piety in verse” (un-named elegist) (A. J. Smith 11). The fact that only one person writes about Donne’s reputation as a poet stands as a great contrast to what Carey writes about Donne and the reputation among his contemporaries: “Donne’s contemporaries recognized him as totally original and matchless poet” (ix). This seems exaggerated. The critical opinions on Donne’s poetry have not only shifted throughout history, but there was also contemporary disagreement. On the one hand, there are evidences to support the claim that Donne was acknowledged for his poetic abilities: Thomas Carew, for example, characterized Donne as “King” of the “universall Monarchy of wit” and acknowledged his pre-eminence in the twin spheres of poetry and preaching” (Haskin, “Donne’s Afterlife” 235). Furthermore, Humphrey Moseley was also positive in his description of Donne some years later, in 1651, where he characterizes Donne as “The

highest Poet our language can boast of” (Smith 12). On the other hand, we have, for example, Thomas Browne who did not have the same positive image of Donne, which we can sense in the title of his elegy to Donne: “Upon the *Promiscuous* printing of his Poems, the *looser sort*, with the *Religious*” (Haskin, “Donne’s Afterlife” 235). Generally, Donne’s reputation as a writer was linked with his role as Dean of St Paul’s rather than as a poet (Smith 11). Carey’s assumption that Donne was praised and recognized solely on the basis of his poetry already in his own lifetime is therefore questionable. Carey apparently wants to emphasize Donne’s status as a poet, but as will be shown throughout this section, the view of Donne was rather more complex, and it took several centuries for critics to learn to fully appreciate Donne’s work.

Ben Jonson was one of the first contemporary authors who commented on Donne’s poetry, his best known commentary being the epigram “To John Donne”, naming Donne as exemplary (Greenblatt et al. 1541). Jonson was a friend and admirer of Donne, but even so, he was critical of Donne’s poetry in some sense (Smith 67). Donne and Jonson differed in their approach to literature on several points, for example when the ways in which they published their poetry is considered: while Donne, as already mentioned, preferred manuscript circulation and known readers for his writings, Jonson collected and oversaw the printing of his *Workes*, written and published in 1616 (Pebworth 23). Even though they wrote at the same time, they differed in both form and content: whereas Donne wrote in a more modern and “free” way with regards to form and content, according to Douglas Bush’s standard work on the literature of the seventeenth century, Jonson believed that the artist should “[react] against Elizabethan vagaries of matters, form, and style, [and] Jonson demanded, and unceasingly strove for, the ageless classical virtues of clarity, unity, symmetry, and proportion; in short, the control of the rational intelligence” (Bush 108). Even though Bush’s book on English literature in the earlier seventeenth century was written in 1948 and this is recognized as a classic, standard work, Bush’s comments are supported by Partridge’s argument some twenty years later, when he states that Jonson complained about Donne’s “liberties with the accentuation of syllables” (233). Furthermore, in the introduction to John Donne in *The Norton Anthology*, it is argued that Jonson made an observation on Donne’s poetry, and stated that “Donne, for not keeping of *accent* deserved hanging” (Greenblatt et al. 1370). Therefore, I consider this argument from Bush to be reliable, even though his book may seem out-dated. Nonetheless, Jonson did speak of Donne as “the first poet in some things”, but he also criticized some of Donne’s works, and stated that “Dones Anniversarie was profane and full of blasphemies” (Smith 69). This view of Donne’s

authorship was to affect his reputation for several centuries, and the overall negative impression of Donne was further strengthened by Dryden's comments on Donne's poetry in the late 1660's (Smith 12).

John Dryden had a great impact on the future reputation of Donne when he in 1668, according to A. J. Smith, stated that Donne gives us "deep thoughts in *common* language, though *rough cadence*"; and this "rough cadence" served then for a hundred and fifty years as a stick to beat Donne" (12, italics added). The positive image that had been created by among others Carew and Moseley was suddenly and surprisingly broken down with a single statement by another leading author. However, John Dryden was not only an author; he was also one of the first literary critics in the English literature. Consequently, his statements may have had more influence than what a criticism from an ordinary author would have had. Dryden furthermore felt that "Donne's poetry was crude in versification and imperfect in rhyme and cadence" (Partridge 233). After Dryden's rough description of Donne's poetry, his works fell almost completely out of print for nearly two decades, and it was not until the nineteenth century that readers and critics started to acknowledge Donne in the way that he undeniably deserved (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 236).

The disadvantageous reputation created by Ben Jonson and John Dryden in the seventeenth century was to stay with Donne for a long time. In the eighteenth century Donne's works fell almost completely out of print, and the testimonies by Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope in the seventeenth century affected Donne's reputation and reception also in the eighteenth century (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 236). This negative overall picture is visible when A. J. Smith's chapter on Donne's reputation and reception in the eighteenth century is considered, where the headline is: "The Eighteenth Century- "Donne is a dull ass"" (165). Although this is an anonymous and undated comment, it described the reputation Donne had in this century in a good way. Alexander Pope continued the line of Dryden's criticism, and stated that "*Donne* (like one of his Successors) had infinitely more Wit than he wanted Versification" (Smith 178). There were some references and entries of Donne's works in this century, but they seemed to have been translated or changed for the texts to adapt to the accepted way of writing: "[...] where his [Donne's] unread productions were referred to as characteristic of an earlier, more barbaric phase of English" (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 236). This is made even clearer when the fact that Pope versified two of Donne's *Satyres* in 1713 is considered, as he published Donne's works together with the new and rewritten version of the *Satyres* (Smith 179). By doing so, Pope apparently wanted readers to see how "barbaric" and primitive Donne's language was, and that his version is

more suitable for the time and society in which they lived. Smith further explains that in the eighteenth century, people associated Donne's poetry with the "barbarism of the Civil War, and thought they found evidence of corruptness in his poetry" (15). In the eighteenth century there thus was a general contempt for the poetry written by Donne, further underlined when the fact that we find few examples of positive statements about his poetry in this century is considered.

In a chapter on Abraham Cowley in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, written somewhere between 1779 and 1781, Samuel Johnson continued the critique initiated by John Dryden, and stood as a main critique of Donne's works and furthermore affected the image of Donne negatively in the eighteenth century (Smith 217). Modern research has shown that Samuel Johnson knew Donne's prose intimately and that he admired it, but he was first and foremost critical of what he described as "metaphysical" poetry: he argued that Donne and the so-called metaphysical poets "cannot be said to have imitated any thing: they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the operations of intellect" (Smith 217). Johnson criticized these poets, and especially Donne, for their "rough style, the unmusical numbers and the far-fetched conceits", but on the other hand, he also praised them for their "fertility of invention" (Smith 217). Although Johnson praised them at the same time as he criticized them, it was the critical remarks that were to be remembered from this essay. However ironic it may be, if Johnson meant to criticize them, his comments on Donne's poetry put Donne back on the literary map in the following century (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 236). In the early nineteenth century, a positive turn started to take place regarding the reputation of the group of writers that Johnson had named as metaphysical poets, especially with regard to Donne.

In the nineteenth century, Donne was suddenly "commended for his warmth of soul [...] when his conceits are said to be the outcome not of cold wit, but of an excess of erotic warmth and fervour" (A. J. Smith 18). Several authors and critics found his poetry worthy of further examination and (appreciative) discussion. Samuel Taylor Coleridge sought to rediscover old poetry and authors from the eighteenth century who were not recognized as fully as they should have been (Smith 263). He was one of the first who recognized how Donne shaped a conceit to establish and "unify an entire poem" (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 236). This turn started to occur in the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it took more than half a century before these thoughts were recognized and broadly established, and from the 1870's we can see a growing interest in Donne in Britain (Haskin, "Donne's Afterlife" 240). However, Coleridge was not the only one who appreciated Donne's poetry: Ralph

Waldo Emerson, having read and studied Coleridge's works, quoted Donne's poetry in some of his works, and he also stated after reading Donne's "An Epithalamion, or Marriage Song on the Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine Being Married on St Valentine's Day" that "This is old fashioned Poetry – I should like to see the poem it was taken from"; George Henry Lewes wrote about Donne in *The National Magazine and Monthly Critic*, ix, April 1838 that "[...] well worthy art thou to be placed in this retrospective gallery!"; and Alexander Balloch Grosart gathered and wrote an academic edition of Donne's poems in 1872-72 (A. J. Smith 302, 367, 468). Even though Coleridge, among others, "rediscovered" Donne in the early nineteenth century, the negative impression of Donne generated by Jonson and Dryden and continued by Pope and Johnson, still affected the reception of Donne's works. Moreover, those reading Donne in the late nineteenth century still struggled with this long-lasting, negative reputation of their beloved poet (Smith 21). For these reasons, we can see that even though Donne experienced a positive turn in the nineteenth century, he was yet to achieve full recognition. This did not happen until the twentieth century, when T. S. Eliot once and for all rediscovered John Donne. Since then, Donne has come to be considered as one of the greatest poets in English literary history, and he is still read with enthusiasm and excitement. A part of the reputation of Donne has also been the challenging path to getting his poetry recognized, and therefore also a part of the myth around him: his genres, dating of his poetry, and what kind of aspects that have been emphasized throughout the history of his reception.

T. S. Eliot was the first and foremost advocate for a positive image of Donne's poetry in the twentieth century, but the rediscovery of Donne also concerns one of the aspects that has contributed to the myth, namely an autobiographical approach to Donne's works: "The revival of Donne as a writer was contingent, however, upon a prior set of biographical interests that in the nineteenth century, drawing on information from Walton's *Lives*, made Dr. Donne significant because he had married for love [...]" (Smith 237). This was not what T. S. Eliot intended, because, as Smith argues: he also "helped to move the center of gravity away from biographical concerns and to stimulate a range of contextual studies" (Smith 242). Even though Eliot presented these thoughts in the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that Donne's personal experiences and beliefs are present in his poetry remained in focus for a long time, especially if one considers the before-mentioned important biographies and accounts of Donne appearing in the 1970s and '80s: R. C. Bald's (1970), James Winny (1970) and John Carey (1990). Consequently, the development of Donne's reception and reputation throughout history has been important to understand why some aspects of Donne's authorship are still – in some literary genres – evident. As we have seen, the image of Donne

shifted towards a more positive image in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and starting with T. S. Eliot, Donne's love poetry in particular has gained more attention worldwide. As the readings of Donne's works generally have increased – parallel to a greater focus on literary criticism as we know it today – one has to be careful not to be tempted by how modern-day biographies emphasize his works.

2.3 Donne's love poetry: reading and interpretation

Modern scholars have highlighted the problem of dividing Donne's poetry into genres, and have, for example, shown that some of his religious poems in different genres bear similarities with poems in other genres, as argued by Heather Dubrow and M. Thomas Hester in their introduction to the chapter on "Donne's Genres" in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* 100). However, the typical division of Donne's authorship presumes that he wrote love poetry in his early literary career, and turned to religious poetry towards the end of his literary career. Donne's love poetry comprises, among others, the *Songs and Sonnets* and the *Elegies*. The *Songs and Sonnets* are the poems which to the greatest extent have formed the image we have of Donne today as primarily a love poet, with poems such as "The Flea", "The Good Morrow", and "The Sun Rising". Furthermore, elegies like "The Comparison" and "The Perfume" have also gained much attention and have throughout history been subject for autobiographical readings.

On the surface, Donne's amorous poetry may seem to be about love between two people who appear to be created for each other. But his poems often turn out to be about divine love or other universal themes. It is argued that more often than not poets write in known genres, and that this helps shape both the form and content of a poem, which also was a concern during the Renaissance period (Parfitt 31-32). However, Donne breaks free from many of the constraints attached to especially the genre of love lyrics, and research has shown that his love lyrics were seldom said to constitute a distinct genre (Haskin, "The Love Lyric" 181). So in this sense, then, Donne may in fact be said to be rather unique, but one also has to consider that he did not "invent" the different features and aspects of poetry which are mentioned; he rather did it to a greater extent than what his contemporaries did.

Ostensibly, both *Songs and Sonnets* and *The Elegies* are about love, and describe Donne's views on love. However, several critics have pointed out otherwise: Guibbory argues that it is more about instability of the self than love as such; his love elegies are also about politics, not just the politics of the bedroom; Christopher Ricks writes about the *Songs*

and Sonnets and argues that “[he] moves from the raciest delineation of amorous motives to a trenchant grasp of sin”; and Douglas Peterson argues concerning the poem from his *Songs and Sonnets*, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, that it “is not simply that the lovers ought to part quietly, since parting like death is inevitable and demands resignation, but *the correspondence between the virtuous man’s relationship to God*” (Guibbory, “Erotic Poetry” 138, Ricks 137, Peterson 290) (italics added). When it is considered that we know that Donne’s poems have a deeper meaning, it will also make more sense to deal with them as something else than autobiographical poems.

As unlearned in the world of literary criticism, one can easily be tempted to read biographical features into Donne’s poems, and this was the case also among literary critics and other authors well into the twentieth century. Except from the reference to Donne’s failed marriage in Walton’s *Lives*, there is no suggestion in this biography to how his love life was, nor his love poetry. For a long time, when literary criticism had not developed to the point as we know the genre today, the readers of his poems have therefore used the lack of knowledge to read what they want into the poems, for example with an autobiographical approach to his poems. Guibbory argues: “Yet so long as we lack evidence for the dates and occasions of Donne’s lyrics, poems like “The Relique” or “The good-morrow” must frustrate the autobiographical readings they invite” (“Erotic Poetry” 138). In this sense, then, Guibbory highlights the way Donne himself contributed to his own image and myth. Donne’s invitation to read his poems as autobiographical may have something to do with the image he wanted to be characterized by. Another aspect of the myth around Donne can, as mentioned, be traced back to Donne’s first biographer, Izaak Walton, when we sense how he emphasizes the developments in Donne throughout his life.

2.4 Izaak Walton’s *The Life of Dr. John Donne*

Biographies written in the seventeenth century is very different from how the genre is now known, as biographers at Donne’s time, for example, were granted rather more creative freedom than we see today. If, for example, a biographer did not possess adequate knowledge about a given incident in the author’s life, there was nothing wrong with him creating or inventing things to write about these incidents. According to Bush, “Significant incidents were sometimes dramatized through speeches remembered (perhaps with the aid of a diary), reported, or *invented* in accordance with the biographer’s understanding of the situation” (italics added) (223). Haskin has shown that Walton’s account of Donne dominates the

nineteenth century view of Donne, “the convert”, and as I want to argue, it has also influenced the view of Donne even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Guibbory 670).

Walton gives an account of Donne as a learned, young man, and that he probably was, considering his education, family heritage, friends, and the places where he frequented. However, one has to be careful not to misinterpret this fact: several critics, for example Carey and Winny, have shown us that we do not read Donne in order to learn about new scientific knowledge in the seventeenth century (Winny 88). Instead, as Carey has shown us: whenever Donne learned about some new development in science, this gave him an opportunity to explore this knowledge with all the artistic freedom he wanted (235). Even though the Renaissance author had a responsibility to teach, move, and delight the reader, Donne, in this context, probably did not write poetry in order to enlighten the reader on any specific scientific area, such as mathematics or astronomy. While he makes clear references to the mentioned scientific areas, – for example in lines eleven and twenty-six in one of the *Songs and Sonnets*, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” – it is not to enlighten the reader on these subjects, but he uses the new knowledge as a starting point for his own speculations: “But *trepidation* of the *spheres*” and “As stiff *twin compasses* are two” (italics added).

Furthermore, even today, when many of Donne’s original letters and poems have been recovered, and bearing in mind the liberties biographers were granted at the time, Walton’s biography still shapes the modern-day, popular image of Donne, largely thanks to the continued references to Walton’s work in the standard biography by R. C. Bald from 1970, and, more recently, the popular biography written by Stubbs in 2007. Although one should not question everything in Walton’s biography, research on Donne has shown that it does not count as an entirely reliable source. Greenblatt et al. report in their description of Walton’s biography in *The Norton Anthology* that: “he enlivens his narrative with anecdotes that are often questionably accurate, and he quotes conversations that he could not have heard.” (1424-1425). This was already established by Bush in his literary history from 1948, when he argues that “[...] biographical material in print were of little use and Walton was indebted mainly to his own conscientious research” (222). Furthermore, Haskin has shown that “Walton revised and augmented his narrative”, and therefore a critical reading of sources that use Walton’s account uncritically must be apparent (“Donne’s afterlife” 234). In my opinion, it seems like a paradox that Walton’s biography is still broadly cited and referred to as a reliable source. Uncritical references to Walton can, for example, be found in both Bald’s, Carey’s, and Stubbs’ biography. This serves to show us that Walton’s biography still is one

of the most influential resources when it comes to the present-day popular imagination of Donne.

Izaak Walton, in his biography of Donne, does not focus on the love poet Donne, but rather on Donne as a religious man. The only place he mentions something even remotely close to love, is his description of Donne's marriage to Ann More: "His marriage was the remarkable error of his life" (Walton 53). Greenblatt et al. explain why Walton stays clear of this part of Donne's life: "Walton's *Life of Donne*, first published in 1640 as a biographical introduction to Donne's collected sermons [...]" (italics added) (1424). In other words: the intent behind the biography was not to discuss his personal relationships or love life, but rather to give an account of how the famous poet-priest came into being. It is, nonetheless, in the field of Donne's amorous poetry where the autobiographical readings seem to be most apparent, even though this is not broadly covered in Walton's account. It is therefore also in Donne's love poetry that readers fail to consider the point of view which both Barthes and Foucault further in their landmark essays, namely that incidents in the poems do not necessarily draw upon personally lived experiences. Critics on Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* differ in what the emphasis is on. Most of them, however, – for example Ricks (1970), Carey (1990) and Haskin (2011) – emphasize that the characters in the poems are not necessarily John Donne, Ann, or another mistress of Donne for that matter: "In some respects, Donne isn't a love poet at all. The physical characteristics of the woman he's supposed to be talking to don't concern him"; "Whatever the perils thus dramatically encountered, it invests our human affairs with a dignity that befits man's standing, at the centre of a cosmic drama"; "Donne avoids making one woman the fixed subject of every love poem. Like some other love poets, he keeps the identities of the several women in the poems shadowy" (Carey ix, Ricks 161, Haskin, "The Love Lyric" 185). Even though Donne was seen as modern and more freely thinking than many of his contemporaries, he still knew which genres he wrote in, and therefore the genre, system and tradition of which he was a part, to some degree decided the form and content of his works. Parfitt argues that it is the nature of the genre that defines roles and attitudes which give the specific genre its characteristic uniqueness (31-32). Knowing that there has been an emphasis on Donne's genres, Ricks is also concerned with this aspect of Donne's works, and he argues that, "His life, career, and personality have intrigued modern readers, at times to the detriment of his poetry" (137). Although not mentioning Donne's genres specifically, he does, in my opinion, nevertheless highlight an important aspect of this discussion: critics and readers of his poems have used Donne's personal life to decide where his poetry generically belongs.

Even though critics in the early 1970s probably had heard about the articles by Foucault and Barthes, there are some disagreements in what their research focus on. “Donne first wrote of love in all its aspects. When his wife died, her place in poetry his was taken by religion” (Partridge 231). This quotation starts off Partridges’ discussion of Donne’s life in his chapter on Donne’s poetry in his book *The Language of Renaissance Poetry- Spenser Shakespeare, Donne, Milton* from 1971. On the other hand, Ricks states in his chapter on Donne that “Thus a love poem takes a polemical form and moves by reference not to the poet’s feelings but to contemporary politics” (1970: 140). These two arguments put forth by Ricks and Partridge both discuss Donne’s love poetry, but, in my opinion, there is a significant difference between the two, except for the fact, of course, that Partridge discusses the death of Ann. Whereas Ricks seeks to emphasize the universal abilities of Donne’s poetry, Partridge argues that a clear division between the young and the older Donne can be observed. Consequently, Partridge’s focus on this difference, as I see it, contributes to the out-dated and mythifying way of looking at his poetry, – the clear difference between “Jack” and “Doctor” Donne – and Ricks seeks – consciously or unconsciously – to emphasize his authorship in general, and not specifically about the mentioned division. These two arguments concerning Donne’s poetry were written at approximately the same time, – respectively 1971 and 1970 – and it is therefore remarkable that they have as different approaches as they do when it is considered that Barthes and Foucault had already published their pivotal articles. Moreover, knowing that these views are still apparent in some areas – as for example in modern-day biographies – how is Donne’s poetry mentioned online?

The most used source of acquiring knowledge in modern society is the search engine Google, with all its advantages and disadvantages. Most people do not use – or do not have access to - scholarly resources when searching online for a given subject. Examples of scholarly resources are JSTOR, Project MUSE, Literature Online, or search engines such as Oria, from the University library in Oslo. These resources are available for free through university libraries, but if one is not part of a university or a literary “community”, they are somewhat expensive. Why should people be willing to pay a large sum of money, when they get the information they need through free online resources? The online search results on Google show the webpages that have the most hits and are the most popular – typically Wikipedia. Then we can jump to the conclusion and say that what is written on these webpages probably stands as the most influential source of knowledge today. When we consider this in relation to John Donne, consequently, what we read about him in these sources may either contribute to the myth around him or invalidate it: do they expand on the

idea that there is a difference between “Jack” and “Doctor Donne”, and how do these resources mention the love lyric of Donne? Is the speaker of the poem separated from the actual poet, or are they the same thing?

When only typing “John Donne” in the search field, the first web page that is encountered is Wikipedia. Wikipedia does actually offer a nuanced image of Donne’s authorship, but even so: Wikipedia is not accepted as a scholarly resource, even though information on this resource is controlled before publishing. However, if information about, for example, “The Sun Rising” is required (keywords “Valediction Forbidding Mourning” in Google), the first four encountered resources are resources that only quote the poem¹. The fifth result, on the other hand, is called “Gradesaver”, and without entering the web page, the quotation that is offered the reader is: “John Donne: Poems Summary and Analysis of “The Sunne Rising” (...) The *poet* asks the sun why it is shining in and disturbing *him* and his lover in bed” (italics added). My contention is that many people do not enter the actual search results they get, but they are satisfied with reading what is on the first result page on Google. Consequently, what one is left with from this search result is that Donne is the speaker as well as the poet of the poem. Gradesaver, therefore, offers the readers an autobiographical reading of Donne’s poetry, and thus contributes to the still-existing myth of Donne being present in the poems.

By evaluating and considering search results from free online resources, one can see in which contexts Donne’s poems are normally cited; for example how they are used and discussed in news articles, or reviews of new books or poetry that have Donne as an inspirational source. It is not irregular to find references to Donne’s poetry online, and by searching how Donne is mentioned in, for example newspapers, we are able to examine the ways our contemporary reporters review his poetry. An example of this is found in *The New Yorker*, in an article written by Carolyn Kormann from 2013 on John Donne’s “erotica”. A sentence in the article states – after we hear that “Donne [...] was the most erotic poet in English literature” – that “Reading him, you can feel what a good lover he must have been” (*The New Yorker*). Kormann believes, in other words, that autobiographical features are traceable in Donne’s poetry. This may be a consequence of R. C. Bald’s depiction of John Donne, when Bald emphasizes what one of Donne’s close friends at the Inns of Court,

¹ https://www.google.no/search?sclient=psy-ab&biw=1280&bih=728&noj=1&q=the+sun+rising&oq=the+sun+rising&gs_l=serp.3..0i67j014j0i67j012j0i67j0.21032.28397.1.28409.14.12.0.2.2.0.457.1625.1j6j0j1j1.9.0....0...1c.1.64.serp..3.11.1630.u0QNSAat98Q Accessed 02.12.15

Richard Baker, described Donne in his *Chronicles* as “[...] not dissolute, but very neat; a great visiter of Ladies [...]”, this will, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to the notion about Donne’s early love affairs and that these are depicted also in his poetry (72). Even though a biography wants to create a certain fantastic image of an author, the reputation of an author will nonetheless be affected when a biographer chooses to emphasize this aspect of his life.

We can see that descriptions of this kind still haunt the reputation of Donne, and are also apparent in Stubbs’ popular biography, for example when he describes “The Perfume” as an account of Donne’s relationship to a young mistress (3). Furthermore, Bald does not separate the speaker of the poem and the actual author when he mentions “The Flea”: “The build-up before love was difficult to bear. “The Flea” [...] describes the frustration *he* could feel” (italics added) (123). Biographies such as these contribute to present-day ideas about Donne that have been present throughout the nineteenth century, namely that his love poetry is read as Donne’s own experiences, and that his life is reflected in the poems. Therefore, everything written about Donne – also books evaluating and discussing his authorship and life in the modern age – does not count as what we know as literary criticism. However, some of these books in different genres have different agendas than to be a critical observer of a given author’s works, for example as in the biographical genre. As have been proven, and also will be further substantiated, these biographies have influenced commentators and critics of Donne. Furthermore, the idea that there is no difference between the author and the speaker of the poem is observable when using the Internet as a resource for acquiring information.

3 “Dr. John Donne”- The Religious Writer

Izaak Walton's *Lives* does not only stand as the most influential source regarding Donne's amorous reputation; the intention behind his biography was to write a biography that concerned his religious life and work, remembering that the biography was meant to serve as an introduction to the 1640-edition of Donne's collected sermons. As a result, his reputation as a preacher is the most important aspect in Walton's biography, which aims, besides, to portray Donne as an “exemplary” man. Donne became a priest in the English Church in 1615 and he was ordained as Dean of St Paul's in 1621 (Bald 302, 372). The ordination meant that he became a more publicly exposed person, because of the public arena in which the sermons were held. During his own lifetime, as already mentioned, Donne seems to have experienced a greater recognition as a preacher than as a poet. This is, however, not something one should be surprised over: for the most of his life, he avoided the printing press, with the exception of six sermons which were published during his time as a preacher (Shami 318). Another exception from Donne's preferment of manuscript circulation was *Pseudo-Martyr*, printed in 1610, an argument that Roman Catholics ought to take the Oath of Allegiance (Stringer, “Composition and Dissemination” 12). Most of his poetry, on the other hand, was mostly first printed posthumously, in 1633, some two years after his death (Smith 11). However, to have a literary reputation did not necessarily involve printing as publication; one could also acquire a reputation through manuscript distribution. Furthermore, both manuscript and print circulation were out of the author's hands. Nonetheless, as his sermons received attention and appreciation both because of the public arena in which they were performed and because some of the sermons were printed, his reputation as a poet was not fully recognized before the poetry was printed and published for a wider audience. When discussing Donne as a religious poet, one has to consider the fact that he wrote religious poetry as well as the sermons he held. In this sense, then, also the religious side of his authorship is divided into a known- and unknown side for the wider seventeenth-century readership; namely the public sermons, and his poetry- still circulating less widely in manuscript.

To discuss and analyse all of Donne's religious works would be an impossible task in a short thesis like this, so the religious works of Donne that will be discussed below are his *Holy Sonnets*, and his *Devotions*. Furthermore, I will also refer to the sermons, but they have for understandable reasons not been subject to as many autobiographical readings as, for example, his love poetry and the mentioned religious works. However, it will be explored how these works have contributed to the image of Donne, knowing that they actually have

been used to pinpoint Donne's personal meanings and experiences, in addition to the fact that Donne was first and foremost known for his sermons during his own lifetime. The 160 collected sermons all date from the period after he was ordained in 1615, until his death in 1631; his *Holy Sonnets* include a series of nineteen formal sonnets, consisting of a fixed rhyme scheme unfolding over fourteen lines; and the *Devotions* are a collection of twenty-three meditations presented as being written during a period of serious illness ("The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne", Greenblatt et al. 1411, 1419). Generally speaking, these religious works can be said to reflect upon the relationship between God and man, how humans appear in the eyes of God, and how the individual soul struggles in the search for a meaning in – and perhaps also after – life. These arguments have been used by readers throughout history as starting-points for discussions about what Donne's life was like, and what kind of man he was. However, the whole method of approach where one seeks to identify or prove certain points about an author's personal experiences and feelings by looking at his written works has also been met with considerable resistance in late twentieth-century and contemporary literary scholarship. As this thesis wants to discuss how and why some of these aspects regarding his authorship have survived, one has to consider in which literary sources and readerships these aspects are evident. Furthermore, can these sources be counted as literary criticism at all, considering the genre of these sources?

3.1 Donne's religious works and their reception

Rather than giving a long and thorough description of Donne's different religious genres, this part of the thesis aims to discuss the question: to what extent have his religious works been interpreted as autobiographical and furthermore, why might one suggest that at all? The sermons are, of course, an important aspect of Donne's life, bearing in mind that this was what he first and foremost was recognized for during his own lifetime. Therefore, a brief discussion of his sermons will be made: this was what he was publicly recognized for during his own lifetime, and we can sense Donne's abilities as a preacher in his exclusively written works as well. However, his *Holy Sonnets* and *Devotions* have to a larger degree been used to read autobiography into his works: in the *Devotions*, Donne writes as if he is writing a diary. At the same time as he presents them as part of a diary, he wants to represent mankind. It is especially in the *Devotions* that one can see how he contributes to the association between his personal life and literary work. Furthermore, in the *Holy Sonnets*, another religious genre that

will be discussed in this thesis, Donne writes about humans in relation to God, and these are also the most problematic of Donne's religious works to date.

Donne's *Holy Sonnets* – also entitled “Divine Meditations” in some manuscripts – consists of nineteen individual sonnets, published posthumously in the first collection of his poems in 1633 (Helen Wilcox 149). Donne's *Holy Sonnets* concerns important questions around mankind and its existence, and can easily become subject for autobiographical reading. This may be observed, for example, when Donne writes in his fourteenth holy sonnet, that “Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you | As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend | That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend | Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new”. Reading this sonnet as autobiographical can especially become a pitfall when influential critics like John Carey writes that Donne needs a God “who would punish him and make him suffer” (35). That is not to say that Donne did not need such a God, but Carey (again) may signal, with a statement like this, that Donne works as both the speaker and the writer of the sonnet, which, after the published articles by Barthes and Foucault, seems like an out-dated way of looking at poetry. The sonnets have been said to reflect Donne's interest in Jesuit and Protestant *meditative* procedures (Greenblatt et al. 1410). This idea had already been established by Peterson, who argued that, “The genre [sonnets] remains for Donne what it had been for Skelton—a mode of intense meditation aimed at discovering the immediate personal relevance of commonplaces that are at the centre of Christian experience” (330). Because of the meditative aspect of his sonnets, then, there is a clear similarity between Donne's *Holy Sonnets* and his *Devotions*.

Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* consists of twenty-three individual meditations, and they were written during a life-threatening illness that Donne endured in 1623 (Stringer, “Composition and Dissemination” 12). Each of these sections contains a ““meditation upon our human condition,” an “expostulation and debatement with God,” and a prayer to God” (Greenblatt et al. 1419). In contrast to much of his poetry, these meditations were published during his own lifetime, in 1624, and were dedicated to King Charles I (Stringer, “Composition and Dissemination” 13). Donne's devotions were written as if the events of the illness were happening as he described them (Greenblatt et al. 1419). Furthermore, as a characteristic feature of Donne's poetry in general, he also uses metaphysical conceits, for example as in “Meditation 4”: “If all the veins in our bodies were extended to rivers, and all the sinews to veins of mines, and all the muscles that lie upon one another to hills, and all the bones to quarries of stone [...]” The metaphysical aspects in these lines can be observed when Donne writes “veins” as “rivers”, and “bones” as “quarries

of stone”. However, Donne’s devotions bear similarities with Donne’s other genres as well. For example, Kate Narveson, has shown that the language of his devotions can also be observed in his sermons (312).

In Peter McCullough’s contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, – “Chapter 11: Donne as preacher” – McCullough supports what has been argued earlier in this thesis; namely that Donne was first and foremost recognized for his abilities as a preacher during his own lifetime and not as a poet (167). Donne, like most of his contemporaries, practiced “the art of persuasively praising virtue or blaming vice, with an emphasis on inspiring voluntary actions by appeal to the auditory’s emotion” (McCullough 168), which is in accordance with the responsibilities the authors of the Renaissance had, namely to teach, move, and delight. Donne was, in other words, a rhetorician at the highest level, and knew very well the traditions on how to preach. Jeanne Shami’s chapter on “The Sermons” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* emphasizes Donne’s knowledge and uniqueness in the art of preaching: Donne used his resources in wit, learning, eloquence, and penetrating insight into human sinfulness and motivation to convert and edify his congregations to a personal experience of Christianity in a reformed English Church (320). Moreover, Donne’s language in the sermons is similar to that of his poems: “personal, rich in learning and curious lore, dazzling in verbal ingenuity and metaphor” (Greenblatt et al. 1423). Donne is here, in other words praised for what Dryden and Jonson criticized him for in the seventeenth century, namely his rough cadence and liberties in the accentuation. The need for a preacher to get the attention from the audience was crucial in the seventeenth century, because the sermon at Donne’s time was completely different from how we know a sermon today. In the seventeenth century, the sermon should “satisfy the need for news, entertainment, social interaction, politics, and, of course, religious edification. They were the mass media of their day [...] but also satisfied a high cultural appetite such as that provided by the theatre” (Shami 323). The idea of a sermon satisfying the need for cultural appetite is especially relevant when Donne’s last sermon, *Death’s Duel*, is considered. Even though this was not one of his best sermons, – considering that his health was bad at the time – *Death’s Duel* is his most famous one.

Death’s Duel was preached at Whitehall in London on the first Friday of Lent in 1630/1631, and published in 1632 (Ramie Targoff 225, Greenblatt et al. 1423, Shami 319), and Walton argued that Donne had just preached his own funeral sermon (71). Targoff critically analyses this idea, and argues that “this notion is obviously fantastic, but the fantasy did not belong to the listeners alone” (225). The idea that Donne preached his own funeral is

furthermore used by Stubbs, who writes in his biography, as a supplement to the statement by Walton, that, “The worn figure in the pulpit was the last of many John Donnes who had come and gone, *as he reinvented himself*” (italics added) (Walton 71, Stubbs 462). Stubbs does not only quote Walton; he reflects upon Walton’s account of “Death’s Duel, and further contributes to the idea that there are many Donnes, as he yet again “reinvented himself”. Knowing that Stubbs continues the tradition of earlier biographers, as proven by Richard Danson Brown, there is a clear parallel to Carey’s discussion of the different Donnes: “For if Donne were obliged to decide that the resurrected John Donne would be John Donne at thirty, or at any definite age, that would exclude from the resurrection all the other John Donnes that he had been” (211). Even though the argument from Carey originally concerns Donne’s amorous poetry, comparing the two quotations from Carey and Stubbs makes one able to see that both of them emphasize the poet’s own focus on the different Donnes, and that Donne in his later years had become a more mature person.

The idea of trying to date different literary works by looking at aspect of Donne’s life has been used by critics and reviewers to separate the writings of “Jack” and “Doctor” Donne. Donne’s religious works were written mostly after he entered the Church in 1615, but some religious works were also written before his ordination, for example *Pseudo Martyr* (1610). Even though critics have struggled to date and organize some of his works, for example his (...), there seems to be an agreement that not just the *Sermons* and *Devotions*, but even the *Holy Sonnets* were written at a later stage in his life than for example his love elegies (Stringer, “Composition and Dissemination” 12-13). Whereas his *Devotions* are presented as dating from a specific period of illness and were published immediately thereafter, his sermons were held on specific dates, where Donne himself also dated them. The question of when Donne wrote the different works is important when considering how some aspects of his authorship are still highlighted today, and also when considering who his most influential critics were, – and are – and how they emphasize different aspects of his authorship. However, as will be discussed, the chronology of Donne’s works might not be important after all, but that Donne functioned as a preacher at a later stage in his life, was important when it comes to his contemporary reputation.

3.2 The presumed evolution of “Dr. Donne”

Traditionally, a clear distinction has been made between the works of “Jack Donne” and “Dr. Donne”. Bush’s book from 1948 on English literature in the earlier seventeenth century, with

a separate section concerning Donne, highlights such division when discussing *Biathanatos*, a work that defended the act of suicide, an idea that stood in stark contrast to the ideas of the English Church at the time (303). Apparently, Donne sent this manuscript version of *Biathanatos* to a friend, telling him neither to burn it nor to print it but to pretend that it had been written by “Jack Donne”, not “Dr. Donne” (Bush 303). *Biathanatos*, given the controversy of the topic, was not published during his own lifetime, but appeared posthumously in 1647, published by John Donne, Jr. sixteen years after Donne’s death (Sullivan, “Biathanatos” 155). The alleged division between “Jack” and “Doctor Donne” is a central theme in the Donne-myth, a myth to which he himself contributed when he jokingly described some of his earlier works, for example the mentioned *Biathanatos*. This joke may support the idea that Donne wanted to create a uniqueness and myth around his own person, where one, to a certain degree, could say that Donne biographized himself. In addition, Bush argues that his great religious poetry was written after his wife Ann’s death in 1617, which may further contribute to the assumption that a sharp change actually did occur in Donne’s works (133). Greenblatt et al., also highlighting the comment from Donne in *Biathanatos*, argue in the introduction to Donne’s literature in *The Norton Anthology*, that Donne contributed to the notion that there was a difference between these two persons: “The poet’s own attempt to distinguish between “Jack Donne”, the young rake, and “Dr. Donne”, the grave and religious dean of St Paul’s, is (perhaps intentionally) misleading” (1372). In my opinion, by writing a concluding comment like this in a letter to a friend, Donne contributed to the myth-making of his own authorship and person by presenting a Janus-faced self-image of himself. Furthermore, one can come to the conclusion when considering this comment from Donne, that he wanted to be considered unique and special; he wanted to create an idea that different works were written by different men or poetic personae, and thus the mentioned “biographization” of himself. This section of the thesis seeks to discuss and stress why and how this alleged change might not be counted as relevant when discussing aspects of Donne’s authorship

R. C. Bald’s biography, written in 1970, remains the standard full-length academic biography written about Donne (Daniel Starza Smith 4). Bald’s biography, as also in Stubbs’ biography some forty years after, emphasizes that Walton’s account cannot be counted as a fully reliable source. This is made clear already in his introduction, where Bald argues that, on some points, Walton’s *Lives* is hard to accept based on some of his practices, for example when referring to a letter written on a given date (12). This letter, as Bald writes, has proven to be put together from different excerpts from several of Donne’s letters, and not just the one

letter Walton is mentioning (Bald 12-13). On the other hand, an appraisal-like description of Walton's *Lives* can be sensed on the first page of Bald's biography when Bald discusses Shakespeare's life in comparison to Donne's. Bald argues that Shakespeare never had such a biography written for him, which has led to autobiographical readings of Shakespeare's works (1). That is the case, because we as readers have had to fill in the blanks by using what he wrote about in his literature, as we know that little is identified about Shakespeare's life. This is, however, not the case for Donne, about whom a short biography or "life" was written already in the seventeenth century (Bald 1). Furthermore, this, Bald argues, is a source of knowledge that in many cases is reliable and trustworthy, arguing that this was the first adequate biography written about an author (1). Even though he does not make a statement as fully trusting and relying on Walton's biography, an interpretation, in my opinion, of Bald's arguments, can lead us to believe so because of the numerous references to Walton's *Lives*.

What is striking about Bald's biography is the double standard of morality that can be observed. Bald several times refers to Walton's biography and he also refers to Walton's *Lives* as a fully reliable source, even though he – often within the same paragraph – warns against the reliability of the biography. For example, Bald states that "This is all speculation", after a long discussion of what Donne did during the years 1589-1591 with references to Walton (Bald 52). Bald fails to see – or at least fails to emphasize – that biographers in the seventeenth century possessed a greater artistic freedom, and biographies were often nearer to the form of fiction than as factual texts. Another example from Bald's biography is when he refers to Walton concerning a conversation between the Lord Keeper and Ann's father (Bald 135). According to Walton, they discuss the marriage between Donne and Ann More, and Walton cites what was being said in this conversation almost word by word (Walton 19). How a biographer could have been present and heard everything in a private conversation must be critically examined. As has been shown, biographers in the seventeenth century had more freedom than biographers today, but Bald refers to a conversation which, in my opinion, could not have been overheard or cited in such a trustworthy manner as Walton seemingly does. Being counted as the prime scholarly edition of a biography written about Donne, it is striking to see how heavily he relies upon Walton, and in some cases, how uncritically he uses descriptions from Walton's biography to substantiate his own claims.

Bald's biography carries, in my opinion, some of the same traits as have been continued in Stubbs' biography from 2007. Both seem to have a more speculative approach to the different aspects of an author. They do, however, not have as an aim to give a strong and insightful analysis of the poetry of the author as a scholarly research has. There are

numerous examples of speculative approaches to Donne's life and poetry throughout Stubbs' biography. These statements are often signalled by words or phrases like "probably" and "might well have been". For example, Stubbs writes that "He was *probably* still a practicing Roman Catholic; and was careful, reticent by nature"; "Donne *probably* still had doubts about his conversion from the Roman to the Reformed Church"; and "Many who knew him by name and reputation, however, *might well have been* shocked by his decision" (35, 237, 303) (italics added). On the other side, Stubbs also questions the reliability of Walton's account, which may seem surprising given that this is one of his primary sources, but which tells us that he does not accept everything Walton says uncritically: "Walton's clockwork scholar cannot, of course, be taken at face value: he only knew (and deeply revered) the older, conservative and ascetic man of the 1620's, in Donne's days as Dean of St. Paul's" (Stubbs 4). At the same time as he criticizes Walton's account, he also uses Walton's biography, in my opinion uncritically, to establish his own statements.

The alleged change from "Jack" to "Doctor" Donne presumably started around the time he secretly married Ann More in 1601 (Parfitt 30). Critics and biographers have further emphasized the change by saying that he was afraid that Ann would find out about his youthful activities, and furthermore changed the tone and theme in his poetry (Stubbs 123). Christopher Ricks, already in 1970, established the idea that Donne's personal experiences have tempted readers to have this kind of autobiographical readings of his literature (137). Even though Ricks' history of literature in the English language was written in 1970 and might be said to appear as out-dated, Foucault's and Barthes's landmark essays on the image of the author were already published and recognized by some critics. Therefore, Ricks' discussion of Donne's poetry and authorship, in my opinion, stands as a reliable source despite the year in which it was written, especially when knowing that the general idea of reading poetry today separates the author from the speaker of the given literary work.

Donne's own attempt to separate the young Donne from the mature Donne becomes clear when Bush and Carey discuss the signature on *Biathanatos*. The influential account of Donne's religious life written by John Carey in 1990 highlights the proposed division of "Jack" and "Doctor Donne" by referring to the same letter and quotation from Donne's letter to his friend as the one Bush uses (Carey x). Bush's book on the history of early modern English literature appeared in 1948, and much has happened in the field of literary criticism since then. It is, however, remarkable that similar division of Donne's literary career is still made today, as we also see the statement on *Biathanatos* used by Stubbs in his popular biography from 2007, emphasizing Donne's own notion that there is a difference between

what his two personae had written (228-229). In addition, Stubbs states that: “Thus began his reincarnation of “Doctor Donne”. His former life was dying before him – literally, in some ways” (310). Even though one cannot go as far as to say that Stubbs’ biography is accordingly divided into two parts – one on “Jack” and one on “Doctor Donne” – statements like these contribute to the assumption that there actually were two John Donnes, one of them writing mature and more thoughtful poetry, and the other part where a “womanizer” is the writer. This typical division of Donne’s poetry has existed from Walton’s time, and still – in some fields – exists today. This can, for example, be observed in the quotation from Stubbs’ biography. However, we have witnessed a turn away from this division the latter years, and his poetry is no longer categorized into what “Dr. Donne” and “Jack Donne” wrote. This is no new phenomenon, and Christopher Ricks, already in 1970, makes an argument concerning this side of Donne’s literary career: “One seeks what may not be there, a singleness of vision that would link the buccaneer of love with the Dean of St. Paul’s” (137). As we see in this quotation from Ricks, it should not be a focus on the two John Donnes, because it is actually not relevant for the discussion of Donne’s literary works at all because the division might not even be there at all. Furthermore, Ben Saunders, in *Desiring Donne*, highlights the problematic division between the two Donnes, and argues that – even though he does not agree with Leah Marcus on some points – Marcus is correct in some of her discussion, for example when the division between “Jack” and “Doctor” Donne is discussed: “a striking melange of sacred and secular that refuses to separate John Donne from Jack” (39). This division does not only concern how the content of his works “changed”, but it also applies to other aspects of the myth, for example his preferment of manuscript circulation.

Stubbs furthermore contributes to an image of Donne that can be characterized as mythifying, stating that after Donne became a preacher and went through a period of maturation, he no longer felt the same contempt for printing his poetry, which also may signal that Donne matured and changed from the young and immature “Jack”, to the matured and more reflected “Doctor Donne” (393-94). As already mentioned, Stubbs’ biography is primarily aimed at an audience which first and foremost is not literary critics but rather what can be characterized as a popular audience, meaning people who do not necessarily have a literary background and are familiar with the ideas put forth by Foucault and Barthes. Therefore, this biography may be liable to repeat rather than contest popular existing myths about Donne the man. However, in my opinion, one cannot bend the truth the way Stubbs does when he mentions Donne no longer feeling the same contempt for the printing press. Several critics have proven this argument wrong, and, among others, Parfitt argues, “Donne

avoids the print entirely, the poems not being published until 1633. He thus sustains completely the role of an amateur” (14). Here it must be noted that he did not actually avoid the print entirely during his own lifetime, but there was a minority of his works that were published. Shami also contributes to the rejection of the argument put forth by Stubbs, arguing that “Only six of Donne’s Sermons [...] were published during his own lifetime” (318). Although such an example is not a major point in this thesis, a small sentence like the one emphasized in Stubbs’ biography does nonetheless contribute to an un-nuanced image of Donne and his authorship. Again, it should be stressed that most people choose “easy-read-books” to acquire information about an author, both because they tend to be written in a more speculative and “appealing” manner, and because they are written chronologically according to the author’s life. Regarding the latter point, it becomes easier for the reader to grasp the main points and developments of the author’s life. Popular biographies like that by Stubbs have greater freedom when it comes to how they analyse and write about an author, but it still, to me, seems wrong if the biographer contributes to communicate an image of an author that has been questioned or even proven to be incorrect in existing scholarship, for example when it comes to manuscript circulation and the dating of his poems.

3.3 Problems of dating and organizing Donne’s religious works

From the time Walton wrote his *Lives*, the problem of dating Donne’s poetry has been a subject for discussion. This is a point made clear even by the biographer John Stubbs, who has been criticized on several points throughout this thesis: “Many of the details in Walton’s story are wrong, but none is more important than his mistaken chronology” (284). This argument from Stubbs is supported by R. V. Young, who states, for example, that Helen Gardner has made some efforts to date and organize the *Holy Sonnets* “according to interpretive considerations, such as Donne’s evolving ideas about the fate of the soul after death [...]”, but that these efforts are rejected (224). I want to highlight this citation from Stubbs in relation to a recognized critic of Donne, because it needs to be said that Stubbs does not only contribute to the myth around Donne, but his biography, on some points, highlights what I see as nuanced and thoughtful images of Donne as well. Therefore, it is not my intention to criticize all aspects of modern-day biographies, but that one has to be critical which aspects of Donne’s authorship fully to trust in such biographies.

The idea of dating Donne's poetry correctly has been important for critics throughout literary history, because the dating of the poems has been used for evidence for what happened in Donne's personal life and can therefore be said to be a major part of the myth around Donne. However, more recent research has shown us that this aspect of his poetry may not be important at all, for example the before-mentioned argument by Ricks (137). Even though most of Donne's sermons are dated, Sullivan shows that sixty-six of his sermons are undated, and attempts have been made to date these, even though these attempts are questionable (Sullivan, "Modern Scholarly Editions" 70). Sullivan further argues in the same article, that Donne's sermons later have been categorized into *where* the sermons were held, rather than organizing them chronologically (70-71). By categorizing the sermons this way, it will become clear how Donne composed series of sermons for the same audience over a longer period of time, and it makes more sense to look at his sermons in this light, rather than in a chronological order (Sullivan, "Modern Scholarly Editions" 71). This way of organizing his sermons stands as a contrast to what the earlier "Oxford Authors" volume did: poems were intermingled with "various prose works in a chronological scheme intended to provide "a clear sense of Donne's development, as writer and thinker"" (Stringer, "Editing Donne's Poetry I" 55). This serves to show us how literary research has developed the last decades, and that a division between "Jack" and "Doctor" Donne is not as important as has been emphasized earlier. Additionally, Young argues in his chapter on "The Religious Sonnet" that a sequence of poems does not depend on the time nor the initial order they were composed, because "The meaning of a passage of poetry is not logically exhausted by the author's intention when he began writing" (224). Furthermore, Young discusses whether or not a correct order of these sonnets exists, and he raises the question whether such an order is important to decide what the meaning of them are, especially the idea that given sequences have a Protestant or Catholic doctrinal orientation (219). Greenblatt et al. also discuss this issue in the introduction to Donne's *Holy Sonnets*: "Our selections follow the traditional numbering established in Sir Herbert Grierson's influential edition, since for most of these sonnets we cannot tell when they were written or in what order they were intended to appear" (1410). Even though Young's argument concerns Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, my opinion is that this argument also can serve as a more general observation on poets' works, and hence a move away from the difference between the two Donnes. Furthermore, problems around the dating of Donne's poetry have also occurred when different editions of his poems have been evaluated.

In addition to problems of dating Donne's works, there is also another factor that is important; namely the problem of Donne's preferment of manuscript circulation. As discussed in chapter two, this meant for Donne's poetry that it was not widely read, and that most of the works were written for the purpose of being read by specific acquaintances. When Donne sent his works to friends or connections, works were often copied in accordance with the receiver's interpretation of Donne's handwriting, and therefore, different collections of poems may have different ways of word spelling (Stringer, "Composition and Dissemination" 21). This furthermore contributes to the more difficult assignment of deciding what was originally in the poem or letter, especially when the idea that Donne may have edited his own poetry after his first or second edition is considered (Stringer "Composition and Dissemination" 22). Moreover, when it is taken into consideration that his works fell almost completely out of print in the following centuries, this aspect is further problematized: if poetry is gone for multiple centuries, it will be more difficult to collect and date it. Consequently, readings and understandings of his poems have varied and it is therefore connected to the myth concerning his reputation and reception.

3.4 Modern-day reception and interpretation of the religious Donne

John Donne—both the religious and the erotic side of his works—continues to excite and amaze people even today, nearly four hundred years after his death. Izaak Walton's *Lives* has contributed to the modern-day image we have of Donne, both when it comes to his religious side and his amorous side. Biographies, as already mentioned, contribute to the popular imagination we have of a given author. Richard Danson Brown writes in his review about Stubbs' biography that "John Stubbs begins with a claim that places him in a line of descent from Donne's first biographer, Izaak Walton" (272). Bearing in mind my criticism and discussion of Walton's *Lives*, this kind of evaluation of Stubbs' biography helps justify the claims put forth about it. Furthermore, Brown argues that Stubbs' biography is heavily influenced by two modern biographical studies, namely John Carey's *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1981) and R. C. Bald's *John Donne: A Life* (1970) (Brown 273). Brown, for example, states that Stubbs is influenced by Carey's great emphasis on Donne's apostasy and what kind of implications this had for Donne's works, while he relies on Bald's research and documentation (273). This parallel has been drawn earlier in the thesis, and Bald's research has furthermore, in my opinion, shown some weaknesses when it comes to relying too

heavily on Walton's *Life*. Additionally, there is also reason to find Carey's substantial focus on Donne's apostasy exaggerated.

Carey boldly opens the first chapter in his *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* by stating that "The first thing to remember about Donne is that he was a Catholic; the second, that he betrayed his faith" (1). Throughout Carey's book, there seems to be an almost obsessive emphasis on the Catholic aspect of Donne's authorship. Even though every relevant example from Carey's book will not be discussed, a statement that can be critically reviewed and seen in contrast to what other critics have said, needs to be cited: "At all events, the Catholic notes in Donne's religious poems are remarkably clear and full. They are the work of a man who has renounced a religion to some manifestations of which he is still, at a profound level, attached" (37). This quotation substantiates the claim that Carey obsessively emphasizes Donne's Catholic belief, especially when other (recognized) critics highlight the fact that Donne's prayers and religious discussion are neither pro-Catholic nor pro-Protestant. Kirsten Stirling, for example, states that "[...] so Donne manages to transform his litany into a prayer that is neither Roman nor Reformed" (236), which stands in direct contrast to what Carey says. We can furthermore sense some of the same argumentation in Shami's article, where she states that Erasmus, as the "pre-eminent sixteenth-century theorist of the sermon", did not recommend any preacher to "zealots of any denomination—Protestant or Catholic" (Shami 321). These two examples are gathered from the Oxford Handbook, and both of them are considered to be reliable and much-cited sources. The Oxford Handbook was published in 2011, with each of the contributors knowing the purpose behind the book; namely to form as nuanced and up-to-date-image of Donne as possible. Consequently, I consider these arguments to outweigh the argument Carey tries to employ in his book on Donne, and Carey's emphasis on Donne's apostasy is, in my opinion, exaggerated. Even though Carey's book on Donne's life and literary career is not as up to date as the two mentioned articles from the Oxford Handbook, it has nonetheless been, and still is, an influential account of Donne. The idea of problematizing Carey's book serves to show us that even prominent and scholarly depictions of Donne and his career have some flaws, and an argument like the one put forth in this thesis aims to inform the reader that we have to be critical trusting also those criticisms that are considered reliable and scholarly.

As already argued, Carey emphasized Donne's conversion to a great extent when he discussed Donne's life and poetry in general, and this is also true for Carey's discussion of the *Holy Sonnets*: "If he hadn't converted, the *Holy Sonnets* could never have been written" (43). The basis for his argument is that through Donne's conversion, he had entered the

“realm of doubt”, meaning that Protestantism was a branch of Christianity that required interference from God rather than experiencing a personal epiphany by looking inside one’s own mind: “God”, as Carey states, “must act first” (43). According to Carey, this is typical for Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*, and he additionally argues that, at this point, Donne’s religious poetry no longer carries any traits of Catholicism. In addition to these quotations from Carey, one could also interpret his argument as Donne’s conversion, in general, can be seen as full of doubt, mainly for the reason that when a person shifts religion, some kind of doubt must exist. Such a reading can be said to emphasize the “wrong” aspects of Donne’s authorship, namely that his life (here: choice of religion) decides what kind of matters were evident in the poetry he wrote. Ricks, on the other hand, emphasizes that Donne’s writings do not suggest specific events, but that they symbolize “argument in a searching activity of the mind” (140). In other words, Ricks specifies that Donne’s poetry does not necessarily stress the Catholic or Protestant aspect of his life, but rather Donne’s general Christian beliefs. However, it is his personal life that has mostly contributed to our fascination of him and his poetry, but this fact does not allow the reader to read autobiography into his works.

Donne might not be the best-known author for most people today. It is, however, no doubt that Donne’s religious verse as well – not only his love poetry, for which he is most famous – continues to amaze and excite readers today. Margaret Edson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, has written a play called *Wit*. In this play, she applies perspectives from Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* on aspects around cancer. In *Wit*, we follow Dr. Vivian Bearing, philosophiae doctor in English literature, first and foremost because of her research on John Donne, as she struggles with cancer (Lamont 569). Margaret Edson uses what Donne has been famous for, namely the use of metaphysical conceits: “Donne’s metaphysical and highly physical poetry is interwoven with the hyper-realistic text” (Lamont 570). Again, an appraisal of Donne’s use of metaphysical conceits can be observed; one of the aspects he first and foremost was criticized for in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, a metaphysical conceit connects two things that not necessarily belong together, but, as Lamont argues, they are entwined with a highly realistic text, and the conceits are not used to criticize, but to praise his poetry. Donne’s works, in other words, are not only recognized in scholarly research, but they are highly visible in other fields as well, bearing in mind that a Pulitzer Prize-winning author applies aspects of Donne’s works in her own.

4 The Image of Donne in Norway Today

Donne's reputation in Norway today is mostly based on his personal life, as a consequence of modern biographers' reliance on Walton. When we read about Donne – either online or in news articles –, we are able to see how different features of Walton's biography have survived, especially the facts that can be labelled as “mythifying”. Even though we know that biographies written at the time Walton wrote his were considered more as fiction than as scholarly attempts to review a poet's life and poetry, Walton's biography is still the primary source for many people when they refer to Donne's life and his poetry. When we read Åsmund Bjørnstad's foreword and Jacob Lothe's afterword in Bjørnstad's translation of Donne's poems in *Eit Menneske er inga øy*, for example, there is no doubt that the emphasis is on personal aspects of Donne's works (traditional historical-biographical criticism), and it is as if “The Death of the Author” had never been written, or as if there had been no development in literary scholarship. However, one has to emphasize that the teaching of Donne on the universities does not favour this kind of approach to his literature, but the focus is rather on Donne as part of a literary system. When we take into consideration that Donne is an extensively discussed and scrutinized author, one could ask how it is possible that this outdated view of looking at Donne is still apparent concerning conceptions about him.

The writings, opinions, and interpretations of Donne's works in Bjørnstad's foreword are clearly affected by the biography written by Izaak Walton and his successors: he several times refers specifically to Walton's biography, and this is the only reference he has to other sources throughout the foreword. However, one has to remember that texts in the genre of what Bjørnstad writes, generally tend to focus on the author's personal life, and these are texts that still explore the division between fiction and facts by creating a story about and an introduction to the person one writes about. Seen from this point of view, therefore, the fore- and afterword do not fit within the genre of literary criticism as we know it. Even so, knowing that Åsmund Bjørnstad and Ketil Bjørnstad are two of the leading persons in Norway to promote Donne and his works, it should come as no surprise that the personal aspects of Donne's life shape our image of him.

Åsmund Bjørnstad suggests that Donne was a man of great learning and his poetry may introduce readers today to the new sciences of Donne's time and age: “Donne is highly familiar with the science of the time, especially the changes in astronomy set forth by Copernicus, and etcetera” (my translation) (15). This seems imprecise, considering that scholars have pointed out how Donne likes to refer as much to old science as to new

knowledge, playfully speculating on various types of insights rather than instructing the reader in any specific type of science or knowledge. Carey, for example, states that “The fact is, he did not care whether the new theories were true or not, so long as they supplied material for his speculation” (235). However, Donne’s comments, especially on religion, could be seen as a description of how religion at the time affected every aspect of society: “Moreover, we ought to read Donne’s Sermons because they were important cultural events that established his considerable contemporary reputation as a preacher in their own day” (Shami 319). In other words, Donne’s comments on religion are something completely else than “his airing” of the new science in the seventeenth century. Even though Walton’s biography is written as an introduction to his sermons, he writes about how well-educated and well-read Donne was, and this may be misinterpreted to mean that a discussion of the new science is apparent in Donne’s works.

The image created by Walton, and furthered by Bald, Carey and Stubbs in later years, has also been established in Norway, as for example we see that the before-mentioned biographers fail to separate the speaker of the poem from the actual writer. The following sentence is written by Åsmund Bjørnstad, and is collected from his foreword to his translation of Donne’s poems: “The marriage started a new phase in the authorship. Several of Donne’s most famous poems describes the meeting with Ann” (my translation) (Åsmund Bjørnstad 13). The division between the young and the mature Donne is emphasized by Bjørnstad also when he refers to Donne’s letter to the Marquis of Buckingham: “[...] from the Mistress of my Youth, Poetry, to the wife of mine age, Divinity [...]” (Bjørnstad 19, Bald 446). In addition, he uses Walton’s biography as evidence of the difference between “Jack” and “Dr.” Donne when he writes that he was called Jack Donne among friends (19). This sentence from Bjørnstad is peculiar, because no reference in Walton’s biography says anything about Donne being called “Jack” by friends. Walton does also not mention the letter Donne sent to a friend, declaring that *Biathanatos* – a defence of the act of suicide and also one of his paradoxes – was written by “Jack”, and not “Doctor Donne”. The idea that there is a difference between the young and mature Donne, however, has been mentioned by other researchers, for example Bush and Carey (303, x). What is striking when considering the quotations from both Bush and Carey, is that they present an image of the author’s life and work that may appear out-dated. Carey’s description of Donne is one of the most cited scholarly sources on Donne in the latter part of the twentieth century, but, as I have argued in this thesis, one may question Carey’s account of, for example, Donne’s conversion (apostasy) and his uniqueness, in addition to Carey’s reliance on Walton’s biography. Thus, one can see

how Åsmund Bjørnstad, too, continues the tradition started by Walton, which later, other biographers, such as Bald, Carey, and Stubbs, also have done.

Åsmund Bjørnstad furthermore refers to a conversation which Walton (probably) could not have witnessed: when Donne received the offer to become a priest, Walton writes that “At the hearing of this, Mr. *Donne*’s faint breath and perplexed countenance gave a visible testimony of an inward conflict” (Bjørnstad 14, Walton 26). When we remember what Greenblatt et al. write in *Norton Anthology* that “[...] that he [Walton] quotes conversations that he could not have heard”, one should bear in mind that a statement like this has to be critically assessed (Norton 1424). According to Walton, Donne received this offer in 1607, which makes the biographer fourteen years old at the time. Although they were good friends, I find it highly unlikely that he could have been present as Donne received this offer. But even so, Bjørnstad refers to Walton’s biography as a reliable source, without considering that this conversation probably was a product of the biographer’s own imagination and speculation. Furthermore, Bjørnstad writes that

To be a family father without the means to fulfil his duties, affected Donne severely, something that was expressed in the poems “Holy Sonnets”, which were written in the years 1609-1614 [...] There, a *reformed soul* is struggling to answer the foundational question: How do I find a merciful God? (my translation) (14).

Here, as I see it, Bjørnstad is fantasizing himself into Donne’s life and poetry. There are several things one could remark in this quotation, for example that there has been much discussion of the dating of his *Holy Sonnets*, but Bjørnstad obviously has an authority when it comes to the dating of his poems, and without references or discussion, he pinpoints exactly when they were written. Furthermore, he has italicized the words “reformed soul”, which, in my opinion, has to mean that he has read the biography written by Stubbs, knowing that his biography is named *John Donne- The Reformed Soul*. In this sense, then, it becomes clear that Bjørnstad himself is no literary critic, bearing in mind that Stubbs’ biography is not considered to be a scholarly literary critic. Instead, Bjørnstad promotes the tradition started by Walton, and continued, among others, by Stubbs, namely that such biographies are counted more as fiction than as factual descriptions of a poet. Whereas such introductions as Bjørnstad’s hardly count as literary criticism addressing a scholarly audience, they play an important role in shaping the popular image of John Donne.

Furthermore, we have to be critical when the contemporary medias write about biographical features in a given poet's works: Forewords to the poetry of an author and biographies are written to create a certain kind of enthusiasm and excitement around the author and his or her writing, and they therefore focus on sensational and exciting aspects of his or her life.

Jacob Lothe has written the afterword to Bjørnstad's translations, and as a Professor of English language literature, he has a more scholarly approach to Donne's works than Åsmund Bjørnstad aims for in his foreword. For example, Lothe places more focus on the literary system of which Donne was a part, but at the same time points out some aspects of Donne that made him special: "With his restless, creative energy, and religious doubt combined with a strong wish to believe, Donne appears as an original and at the same time representative poet in the European late-Renaissance" (my translation) (Lothe 135). However, when he writes about "The Good Morrow", one of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, he states that: "He who leads the word in the poem (*Donne*), identifies his face's light with his girlfriend's [...] It is the light from his girlfriend that makes his [Donne's] life meaningful" (my translation) (137). Here, Lothe identifies the speaker of the poem with Donne the man, which may not necessarily be the case. Consequently, this contributes to a biographical reading of the poem, and when this is argued for in one poem, people may be tempted to think that this is how other poems should be read as well. Nonetheless, when discussing "A Fever", Lothe makes a distinction between the poet and the speaker, and argues that: "Even if it is a close and strong relation between the speaker of the poem and Donne as author of the poem, the "I" stands almost forth as a dramatic person who speaks directly to us as readers" (Lothe 139) (own translation). Additionally, there is also a major focus on how previous critics have considered Donne to be one of the first persons to use metaphysical conceits (Lothe 137-138). Donne surely did not have any idea that he would be characterized as the founder of the "metaphysical school" in the future. Lothe speaks more to a scholarly audience in his afterword, but to some degree, he still seems to promote the idea that Donne is the speaker as well as the author of a poem, and he thus contributes to a biographical reading. But again: this afterword is included in a translated collection of poems, aiming at a popular audience rather than an academic readership.

Composer-pianist Ketil Bjørnstad, as already mentioned, writes about his own music set to Donne's lyrics that "Donne's dramatic life is reflected in the texts, and in them rests a source of passion and music" (*Opera til Folket*). We sense here that Bjørnstad favours the traditional historical-biographical approach to reading poetry because of his focus on Donne's life being reflected in the texts. Furthermore, as this is one of the first quotation one

encounters when searching “John Donne” on Norwegian web pages, he is clearly – through this description – contributing to the myth around Donne in Norway. On the other hand, this is a medium where one has to create a certain kind of “wow-factor”: Donne, probably not the best-known author among most people in Norway, needs to be promoted in a way that appeals to a broad range of people if Bjørnstad wants to make his own music known and popular. Given the genre of his description, this hardly counts as literary criticism. If unlearned in the field of literature, one may also be tempted to see the irony in what Ketil Bjørnstad does: Stubbs argues that in “The Triple Fool”, Donne is the speaker as well as the writer of the poem, and he, therefore, also dislikes the idea that musicians set music to contemporary poetry (30). Stubbs’ “evidence” can be observed in the following quotation: “In one poem, ‘The Triple Fool’ he expresses annoyance at some man for setting his ‘whining poetry’ to music, and thus freeing once more the grief ‘which verse did refrain’ (Stubbs 30). Even so, as Bjørnstad and Bjørnstad are two of the few people in Norway who promote Donne in their own works, the image of Donne in the popular imagination will be shaped by descriptions like these, and therefore also contribute to establish and continue certain aspects around Donne’s myth, for example his reputation as a ladies man, the difference between “Jack” and “Doctor Donne”, and autobiographical readings of his poetry.

Donne’s “Meditation 17”, a part of his *Devotions*, is one of Donne’s best-known pieces because of the quotation “No man is an island, entire of itself”. This quotation has also been used by many people to describe the situation in which they find themselves. Haarberg emphasizes in a forthcoming article, that, although writing mostly for the Norwegian audience, misinterpretations and misuses of this quotation occur (Jon Haarberg, “Litteraturen i Kongens nyttårstaler”). He for example shows that in King Harald’s New Year’s Eve speech from 2008, this line from Donne’s “Meditation 17” – in connection with discussing the situation for refugees – is used in order to argue that we as people are never alone, and Donne’s Christian perspective has disappeared. Furthermore, it is stated in this speech that the line is collected from a *poem* written by John Donne. Donne’s *Devotions* is a series of considerations regarding Christianity and mortality, and not, as King Harald so nicely states in his speech, a note on human tolerance and compassion. Donne is not a well-known author among most people in Norway, but when Donne is quoted in one of the most seen interviews in Norway throughout the year, he suddenly becomes public domain. Furthermore, without any further context for the line from Donne’s seventeenth meditation, people will probably never know the circumstances in which this meditation was written, in addition to having

“correct knowledge” about the “poem”, which, with a little more research, proves to be wrong.

To conclude, most people do not turn to scholarly reliable sources when needing information about an author like Donne. Rather, the search engine Google is used – without any further specification than “John Donne” and “no man is an island” – to find the information needed. When these words are put in the search field in Google, we see that the second result we get refers to this line as a line from one of Donne’s most famous “poems”². Furthermore, if we enter the keywords “John Donne” and “poems”, the first result that shows is a web page called “Poemhunter”, and this web page refers to the line from the mentioned meditation as a line from a poem³. In this sense, then, one could ask the question of whether or not the Internet is a reliable source for acquiring knowledge about an author like John Donne and his poetry. The answer to this question, on the one hand, is of course “yes”, if you are able to evaluate the search results you get, and you know which sources are reliable and not. For example, you cannot trust “Sparknotes” or “Shmoop” to provide reliable information, because they are not aimed at a scholarly audience. On the other hand, when knowing what kind of sources that are reliable and widely used, the Internet is of course a valuable resource. Nonetheless, knowing that several of the search results provide us with aspects of Donne’s life that can be characterized as mythifying, one first of all has to be critical towards the information acquired.

² <https://www.google.no/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=john%20donne%20no%20man%20is%20an%20island> Accessed 04.12.15

³ <https://www.google.no/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=john+donne+poems> Accessed 04.12.15

5 Conclusion

The views on Donne's authorship have varied from the day he started writing poetry, and our present-day ideas about him as a writer have been shaped mostly by what his first biographer, Izaak Walton, wrote about him in the seventeenth century. The emphasis on Donne's uniqueness – especially in biographies – in many parts of his authorship have been contested by reflecting upon secondary and more reliable sources than what a biography can be characterized as. Furthermore, the last chapter in the thesis has sought to enlighten and critically review the images created of Donne in modern-day Norway.

It has been shown throughout the thesis, that, even though biographies do not count as literary criticism, they are nonetheless contributing to the popular imagination on Donne and his authorship. We know that the biography written by Stubbs (2007) is not counted as a scholarly resource, but the biographies by Bald (1970) and Carey (1990) are counted as biographies that have a more scholarly approach to Donne's literary life. Even so, it has been shown that also these scholarly biographies bear some kind of mythifying aspects when it comes to autobiographical reading and not being able to separate the speaker of the poem from the poet. In my opinion, even though only smaller parts of their biographies mention these aspects, they nonetheless fail to emphasize the views put forth by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in the late 1960s. In some respect, these biographers write almost as if the pivotal articles by Barthes and Foucault had never been written. Furthermore, these biographies have also influenced the way we look at Donne in Norway today, ideas continued by, for example, Åsmund Bjørnstad and Ketil Bjørnstad. It has been shown that they are influenced by Walton's account of Donne, in addition to Walton's successors (Bald, Carey, Stubbs), especially Åsmund Bjørnstad, who makes a clear reference to the biography by Stubbs in his foreword when he mentions Donne as a reformed soul.

It is not, of course, my aim to criticize all aspects of biographies. However, blindly trusting all information in a genre like this would be a mistake. In my opinion, the idea of reading poems autobiographically has its roots, at least in Norway, in the teaching of literature already during elementary school. However, every English teacher does not have a literary background, and their views may also be formed by what kind of assignments are evident in books on the curriculum, as has been shown in the introduction. There is, of course, no easy solution to this problem. As an English teacher, one has to complete introductory literary courses at higher education, but as I see it, these introductory courses do not emphasize the modern way of looking at poetry to a great enough extent. Therefore, it

should not come as a surprise that most people – people without a higher degree in English literature – choose to read poetry autobiographically.

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