

ABSTRACT

INCONSTANT DEVOTION: JOHN DONNE'S CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND THE *DIVINE POEMS* OF 1608-1611

This study of Donne's devotional poetry links several of his meditative poems to an intense period in the poet's life when he struggles to reconcile Catholic doctrines of his youth with his emerging public Protestant identity within the Jacobean milieu. Using a biographical framework in my analysis, I argue that the tension and despair of works such as the *Divine Meditations* are attributable to Donne's attempts to reconcile Protestant theology with Catholic tenets crucial to the poet's religious imagination. Similarly, Catholic sacramental traditions play an integral role in Donne's persona in pieces such as *La Corona*. Establishing a connection between Donne's desire for religious constancy and his Catholic-influenced devotional poetics is therefore important to understanding his private art as well as his later public role as an Anglican priest. This connection also illuminates how Donne paradoxically synthesizes a "consistent" religious identity from conflicting strains of Catholic and Protestant theologies.

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