‘Did we lie downe, because ’twas night?’: John Donne, George Chapman and the senses of night in the 1590s

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Above the now lost bough of the rood, in the highest panel of the Doom picture in St Peter’s, Wenhampton, Christ judges the world, whose fate is spread below him. He is seated on a rainbow flanked by the sun to his right and the moon to his left.¹ In the early 1500s the story of light and dark expressed in the representation of sun, moon and rainbow above darkness held a clear but also complex and evocative message concerning God’s power. The force of such precise and suggestive symbols was changed, not abolished, by subsequent events. If, in 1500, light and dark were at God’s command in the heavens, so were they in 1668 when Milton’s fallen angels wander amongst ‘shades of death’ in ‘A Universe of death, which God by curse | Created evil’ (*Paradise Lost*, II.622–23). Milton’s darkness, like that of the Doom, holds an assumed relationship between sensory perception and cognition. Light and darkness are known within the symbolic lexicon which automatically sorts light with life and dark with deprivation, wickedness.² However, Milton’s angels wander in a ‘universe’ – by the time Milton writes, the heavens themselves have changed. In assessing this world the senses were both a prime tool and an impediment, and were understood as such.

As we know, between the Doom and *Paradise Lost*, a subject’s relationship with visuality was reshaped – in part by the Reformation; in part by the innovations and controversies over the moving universe. Within the narrower sphere of night and light, at the same time as we find conceptual shifts, Craig Koslofsky argues, the whole of Renaissance Europe saw a crucial shift in people’s sensory and other relationships to time as improved illumination opened up precincts of the day hitherto less explored, and changed, patchily, the previous pattern of first and second sleep which had filled the lightless hours.³ The sensory and material changing of the nocturnal environment and practices as the long darkness was gradually artificially illuminated, particularly when set alongside changes to the heavens and steadily louder ticking of clock time, invites further exploration in relation to literary texts. Night, light and shadow changed as ground for thought. Framed by the large question of whether changing

perceptions and experiences of night constitute an epochal shift, this essay works on a small scale to investigate the place of the senses in understandings of light, dark and shadow in the post-Reformation period, using the evidence of the writings of two contrasting poets, John Donne and George Chapman. Both use night as a testing ground for ideas concerning sensory perception, but in what appear to be quite different ways. Their writings stage experiential scenes where we see situations that engage the main discourses on night, light and shadow – religious, philosophical and classical. This essay explores how they use night, light and shadow to engage the reader in debates about their world.

We can begin with Donne's will, where he disposes of his personal time keeping technology:

And my will & desire is that my verie worthie frend and kind Brother in law
S^tThomas Grymes [...] be Overseer of this my Will To whome I give hereby the
 Stryking clocke w^{ch} ordinarilye I weare [...] Item my will is that the fower large
 pictures [...] shall remayne still in those places As also the Marble Table Sonne
 Dyall and Pictures w^{ch} I haue placed in the Garden[.]⁴

The striking clock was the first bequest, and to a person of both emotional and practical importance. The sundial is counted among the things to be inventoried in order that it remain, with table and pictures, as part of an enduring philosophical environment inviting those who enter the garden to learn by looking.

Donne's attitude to time has been the subject of much critical enquiry but is almost always framed in terms of attitudes found in later devotional writing.⁵ However, as we see, even at the very end of his life the sundial, with its sensory orientation in the apprehension of time, was at the centre of his thoughts. The dial, and particularly the sensory environment of light it uses, is very little investigated in relation to Donne's writing, notwithstanding that engagement with the senses and with night, light and shadow is sharp and analytical in Donne's 'Songs and Sonnets' (1635). Donne's creative destruction of earlier forms (the sonnet, the sequence) and addressees (the lover replaced in his poetry by apparently multiple lovers and addressees) involves the strategic but unforegrounded importance of the significatory power of the senses. If his poems re-examine contemporary forms then, this investigation suggests, they also take the night, light and particularly shadow as prompts to thought. As a treatise from the 1590s puts it, 'The Skeptick doth neither affirm nor deny any position'; Donne's use of night, light and especially shadow both elaborate and draw on their place as a ground of philosophical thought.⁶

An example of the key role of the senses in Donne's early poetry is the 'Lecture Upon the Shadow'. The poem is generally regarded as needing explanation, and critics tend to explain the use of shadows shortening and lengthening in the poem as standing for the uncertainties that shade the lovers' frankness in the early, morning stages of love, disappearing at love's zenith only to be replaced by shadows facing the other way.⁷

Except our loves at this noone stay,
 We shall new shadowes make the other way.
 As the first were made to blinde
 Others, these which come behinde
 Will work upon our selves, and blind our eyes.
 If our loves faint, and westwardly decline,
 To me thou, falsely, thine,
 And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.
 (ll. 14–21)⁸

The possibility of continuing love is introduced almost parenthetically and semi-subjectively; ‘Except’ the love stays at frank, ‘reduc’d’, undisguised noon, there is no alternative but that love will decline and so be shadowed by disguise, feigned openness, lies. If ‘morning shadowes wear away’ these ‘grow longer all the day’. The problem is gathered up in the final lines, into the problem of love, time and night:

But oh, love’s day is short, if love decay.
 Love is a growing, or full constant light,
 And his first minute, after noone, is night.
 (ll. 24–26)

It appears that, ultimately, the lecturer abandons the link between love and diurnal sequence because the time of love is more extreme, fast and absolute than the path of dawn to dusk and if not growing or noon, is nothing. In this reading, light and dark, noon and night, become failed metaphors, and so shadow’s part in love is, in fact, minimal, implied only in its growing phase. In this, usual, understanding, the shadow becomes almost a ruse; a proposition finally abandoned as inappropriate. In this logic, love is ultimately severed from the metaphoric link with light and dark and one ‘point’ of the poem, therefore, is to lead us to see love and sensorily measured time as distinct. If we follow this understanding, then the poem works in something like the same way as ‘The Computation’, which sets up an elaborate sum translating 24 hours into 2400 years, only to end by brushing aside the metaphor with an expostulation – ‘Can ghosts die?’ (l. 10). To understand ‘Lecture’ in this way invites the question of why the poem goes to such lengths to build an image of human behaviour which insists on the very link that it apparently abolishes between a sensory apprehension of time (as daylight, shadow, night) and love. This is particularly significant, given the slightly tortuous ways it does so (hence the explication so often provided).

What happens if we give more weight to the strong focus on the shadow? The title might justify this, in that it is the poem’s exploration of visual technologies of measurement that make it a philosophical ‘lecture’. Moreover, the poem explores the relationship between love and time using the idea of a sundial and it is clear that in doing so the poem is also interested in the physical and sensory

world. As Christopher Bardt writes, sundials 'are catchers, recording instruments, translators of light into time' and the poem both uses this translating quality of light to time and adds its own translation, back and forth between the lovers' shadows and the measurements of the sundial.⁹ The poem explores the subjection of sensory experience to technology of thought and measurement. As Thomas Fale noted in 1593, once 'the reason and proportion of shadowes' had been discovered, dials could show time.¹⁰ The poem prompts us to think in numbers, but also in terms of sight – declining, reclining, and in degrees with an implied zenith and nadir – as Fale describes.¹¹ Critics, however, tend not to consider the dial a driving vocabulary in the poem, perhaps because sundial time and the time of love are understood as split in the final lines. Love's decay is understood as different from sundial time because 'his first minute, after noon, is night' (l. 25). However, and as the comparison with 'The Computation' illuminates, in this poem the use of sense and technology are held together linguistically; even in the last line the poem goes on translating between time and light.

The continuity of the patterning of time, love and light to the end of the poem invites us to re-read it with attention to time and shadow. The final lines see the appearance of 'he', Cupid, who is not present when love is growing. If Cupid prompts us to think about Venus it might be a reminder of the poem's concentration on the physical, venereal love of 'tread', and we should also, perhaps, be reminded that Donne read, and wrote, riddles; the 'Songs and Sonnets' uses such structures.¹² In that spirit, we can recall that elsewhere Donne thought of Venus as a planet and so in the poem's last line, Cupid, as the son of Venus, and so coming after her. This can remind us to think in planetary hours.¹³ The planetary hours of a day, while still being 12, measure not from midnight to midnight but from dawn to dusk (in day hours) and dusk to dawn (in night hours), and the further one is from the equinox the greater the difference between day and night hours.¹⁴ As Fale puts it, we need to think of the movement to and from twelve as in 'unequall houres'.¹⁵ In order to 'know the hower of the day when the Sun shineth', Fale directs his reader to 'seeke in some Calender in what Signe and degree the Sun is that day'.¹⁶

If the concept of the short planetary day is in play in the poem's final lines then, using a kind of time appropriately based in the senses because cued by light and dark, we are able to see that the poem really does go on translating between light-time and love, or desire and dark (or night-time), and the death of love or desire after consummation. The 'unequall', planetary hours were not so short that noon was, literally, followed by night but they were regularized in the sundial's use of the interior of a hemisphere; sundials not only translate light but also translate time, from the sensory and planetary time of dawn to dusk into the regular hours.¹⁷ The dial technology, emphatically present throughout, seems in part to link the sensory light of day and night's 'unequall

hours'. If the poem separates love and clock time, simultaneously it suggests that both love and time rely on the senses.

'Lecture' is not literally a riddle; its chains of association are looser and more allusive than riddles permit. However, it shares with riddles the making strange of human behaviour for, clearly, in deriving human qualities from the behaviour of shadows, the poem allows light, dark and shadow to drive the poem, making human love correspond to the translation of light into time. If the final lines seem to abandon, even reject, the lecture's premise of a relation between love and hours, they simultaneously maintain that link. The time of the sundial 'is' hours, but not as a clock; a sundial shows apparent time in a local context but, to stretch a point, the translation of unequal into equal hours is itself a kind of disguise. Time and love are both, we can speculate, undisguised – and maybe both are, therefore, disclosed as both sensory for time is light and shadow, love – desire? Whether or not this reading holds, it is clear that attending to the poem's meditation on light, dark and shadow and on its translation of light into time illuminates Donne's engagement with the technology of light-time as significant in his writing on time, eternal and human. Indeed, in the early modern environment time was marked most accurately by bells and light; in Henry VIII's tower at Nonsuch the clock sits between the sundial and the bell. It is not surprising that Donne uses the effects of light as a ground for argument.

'Lecture' is far from alone in Donne's earlier writing as an investigative use of the senses, more specifically light, dark and shadow. In 'A Nocturnall Upon St. Lucie's Day', the senses are interwoven with alchemical language and an elaboration, even multiplication, of the absence of light, the world of dark. The poem has been read as referring to the death of Anne More but also paired with the 'Lecture' as solstice and shortest day.¹⁸ 'Nocturnall' uses the senses as a ground of thought, but where the 'Lecture' restricts the frames of reference to which they apply, 'Nocturnall' multiplies discourses within which the senses signify.¹⁹ These vocabularies might be read as reinforcing the information derived from the senses but, equally, as contradicting it.

The Christian calendar marks St Lucy's Day as 13 December, remembering the meagre 'seaven houres' daylight of the 'yeares midnight' (ll. 1–2). St Lucy, straddling Catholic and Protestant traditions, is a sensory saint, in the best-known version of her story carrying her eyes before her on a plate (they have been torn out but God has healed her). Paradoxically and appropriately, St Lucy is patron saint of the blind and celebrated in a festival of light; the multiplying dark nothings, deaths and absences of the poem – 'the Sunne is spent', 'life is shrunked, | Dead and enterr'd' (ll. 6–7) – are framed by the day's festival reputation. The speaker, made by love's 'Alchimie', 'A quintessence even from nothingnesse' (ll. 13–15), in the aftermath of his lover's ambiguous 'death (which word wrongs her)' (l. 28) is 're-begot | Of absence, darknesse,

death; things which are not' (ll. 17–18). Donne ties the vast, operatic excesses of amatory and sexual loss (whereby the world is drowned in the lovers' tears, they became 'Chaosses', their literal, sexual or spiritual 'absences' made them 'carcasses' (ll. 22–27)) to a precise distillation of nothing – 'the grave | Of all, that's nothing' (l. 21) and 'Of the first nothing, the Elixer' (l. 29). Working downwards through the vital Aristotelian hierarchy the poem demonstrates the speaker's absence:

Were I a man, that I were one,
I needs must knowe; I should preferre,
If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love. All, all some properties invest;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As a shadow, a light, and body must be here.
(ll. 30–36)

'But', we are told, 'I am None'. Donne's speaker is precise in an enumeration of the absent qualities of nothing by an opposition of the vital souls of the world from human to stone, all of which, including stones as the vital matter of the world, had life and so, sense. This speaker is not human – 'Were I a man [...] I needs must knowe.' The final movement of the poem challenges the temporal schema of death and renewal at the level of its component parts. Sun, multiplied as a 'lesser Sunne', is sent on sexual errands to bring lower lovers more desire and the astrological implication of the 'limbecke' (l. 21) distillation is diverted into an astrological joke on the 'Goat' (l. 39). The poem's alchemy for the speaker and his lover is his lover's canonization and St Lucy's day's rededication as her 'Vigill, and her Eve' (l. 44). The three schemas of light and dark (the annual and Christian cycle, the alchemy of spring and of transformation through love), as well as the reverse alchemy of his epitaphic nothingness, have all been working together to celebrate the lover's 'long night's festivall' (l. 42). The sudden juxtaposition of the parts of the descriptive vocabulary turns the inward orientation of the nothing-speaker back towards the world and the present in a final (but not conclusive) alignment of his night, his lover's night and the festival of St Lucy.

The shadow, specifically, in the 'Lecture' and 'Nocturnall' is distinct from night and light in being strongly associated with the body it registers both in the metaphor of the lovers' shadows and in the 'ordinary nothing' of a shadow that implies 'a light, and body must be here' (l. 36). Thus, Donne's speculations on the shadow remind us that, while he uses gradations of light in distinct ways as poetic visualization, when he was writing, shadows were present in other cultural precincts; like the planets, the shadow was subject to enquiry. Used by Leonardo da Vinci in relation to perspective, it was also explored in two significant myths.

The shadow has a distinct life as a key component in the understanding of visual representation, through the story of the birth of painting told by Pliny, which ‘all agree [...] began with tracing an outline around a man’s shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way’. Pliny told an additional story in which a girl loves a young man and ‘drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by the lamp’ and her father later made a clay statue.²⁰ At the same time, the tracing of the shadow was the ground against which the development of painting as an art measured itself. As Quintilian put it: ‘For what, I ask again, would have been the result if no one had done more than his predecessors? [...] the art of painting would be restricted to tracing a line around a shadow in the sunlight.’²¹

The story of the shadow outlined was at the origin of how painting thought about itself as a constantly improving art, though it seems also to have implications for the nature of desire and sensory fulfilment.²² For the present argument, painting is significant not only because it attends to the shadow in theory and practice, but also because of the very specific role of the shadow in this story of the creation of art. The shadow, not the physical body, is what is outlined in the story; it is the shadow of the form, not the form, which sets going the competition in representation. The shadow has an ambiguous but crucial status. It is thrown by light, so it is natural, but in stimulating the leap to representation it comes to have a semi-representational status itself – readily used as such if framed or theatricalized as in the puppet theatre, the myth of real and illusory in Plato’s cave, or the shadow almost lost and so painfully returned in *Peter Pan* (see for example visual meditations on the shadow by Tim Noble and Sue Webster).²³

Plato’s cave uses the shadow’s interstitial properties to explore the relationship between experience (sense) and knowledge. The shadow’s important presence in the scenes of knowledge described in Plato’s cave is only the best known philosophical use, widely known in the Renaissance. Dwellers in Plato’s cave have their reality mediated and manipulated. Here, the sensory apprehension of shadows both substitutes and unfits the humans for the experience of full, actual, light.

Obviously, like all other referents the shadow signifies according to representational context. Donne’s poems do not develop philosophical arguments on the shadow; rather, they put to work a feature of sensory and cognitive experience that is strongly linked to both sense and questioning: light and dark, but particularly the shadow, were emerging in sixteenth-century England as a ground for thought. The mythic lineage of visuality in thought and art, in which the contrast of light and dark is the ground of thought of various kinds, is suggestive about the way in which Donne’s poetry uses the sensory apprehension of light and dark and, specifically, the shadow. In the ‘Lecture’ the shadow operates as a ground on which the poem is built in a way reminiscent of the

myth of painting as initiated by the prompt of the shadow. In the 'Nocturnall', light and dark are the starting place for the elaboration and overthrowing of the poem's metaphorical and analogous sequence. In each case, light and dark are the starting place of the poem in the dual sense of preceding the poem's ideas but also prompting them. The myths of light and art schematize and consider the obvious fact that apprehension of the effects of light and dark are bound up with cognition which, in turn, rests on assumptions about the world's organization – something which, as far as light was concerned, had changed cataclysmically in the period before Donne began writing and continued to do so. Donne was engaged with the transformation of the heavens.

Johann Kepler, in his Galilean 'optick' story of the moon, writes that 'I suspect that the author of that impudent satire, the *Conclave of Ignatius*, had got hold of a copy of this little work, for he pricks me by name at the very beginning. Further on, he brings poor Copernicus to the Judgement seat of Pluto.'²⁴ As Marjorie Hope-Nicolson explores, *Ignatius* discloses Donne's awareness of contemporary developments in the theory of the Earth's relationship to the universe. These are articulated where his speaker experiences an ecstatic voyage to another world, in this case Hell and the moon. While 'in an Extasie' his 'Soule':

had liberty to wander through all places, and to suruey and reckon all the roomes, and all the volumes of the heavens, and to comprehend the situation, the dimensions, the nature of the people, and the policy, both of the swimming Islands, the *Planets*, and of those that are fixed in the firmament.²⁵

The speaker should be silent on this topic, he says, since Galileo has 'of late summoned the other worlds, the Stars to come neerer to him, and giue an account of themselues', and since Kepler, following Tycho Brahe's death, 'hath receiued it into his care, that no new thing should be done in heauen without his knowledge'. This knowledge is so detailed that Hope-Nicolson considered it to be possible, even likely, that Donne had read Kepler's controversial *Somnium* in manuscript.²⁶ Whether or not this was the case, and Hope-Nicolson's account is convincing, there is no doubt that Donne brought the implications of the new world to his thinking on the senses and to the Christian, moralized thinking on light and night bound up with that. Overall, then, while in 'Songs and Sonnets' Donne's poetic focus on night, sight, light and shadow uses sensory data as a ground of knowledge which can be repeatedly undercut, when we add this active engagement with the changing movement of the heavens we can see that sensory data not only makes experience vivid but feeds into more systematic kinds of knowledge.

A year earlier than *Ignatius*, in 1610, Donne had written 'The First Anniversary', canvassing 'the Starres which boast that they do runne | In Circle still, none ends where he begunne' (ll. 275–76) because 'Man hath weav'd out a net, and this net throwne, | Upon the Heavens' (ll. 279–80), a capture undermined

relentlessly by human time and darkness within which ‘mankinde decayes so soone, | We’re scarce our Father’s shadows cast at noone’ (ll. 143–44).²⁷ While all scholars accept that Donne was thinking about the changes in the heavens, what he thought, and the grounds for making such an assessment are debated. However, without asking, for example, whether different narrators are to be considered as disclosing his opinion, we can ask whether the sensory apprehension of light and dark, so closely aligned with time and death, mark for Donne the extraordinary new part the heavens were known to play in the diurnal cycle. In the ‘Songs and Sonnets’ we can see that the senses were repeatedly interrogated as indices of situations. If in ‘Lecture’ the senses are crucial but problematic in the apprehension of time and love, in the ‘Nocturnall’ the whole implication of day, night and light on the darkest day is rearticulated in the final stanza. As we see in these poems, perhaps most forcefully in ‘Breake of Day’, the sensory perception of night and light is consistently foregrounded as the ground of thought:

‘Tis true, ’tis day, what though it be?
O wilt thou therefore rise from me?
Why, should we rise, because ’tis light?
Did we lie downe, because ’twas night?
(ll. 1–4)

‘Love’, which in ‘spight of darkness’ brought the lovers to their encounter should override ‘light’ (ll. 5–6) too but, in fact, is itself overridden by ‘businesse’ (l. 18). The senses are part of action but not the whole; humans can override night and light, yet the senses remain the ground of metaphor and thought. Donne’s ‘Songs and Sonnets’ put the senses to work in researching the world.²⁸

Charles Coffin has noted Donne as a non-pastoral poet.²⁹ However, even as Coffin seems to bypass Donne’s engagement with the senses, he engages sharply with their key discursive location in Donne’s systematic thinking – scepticism. Coffin has influentially framed Donne as caught between two ways of interpreting the world, one ‘scholastic’ and synthetic, the other Galilean as ‘new facts made a cleavage between the realms of the physical and metaphysical’.³⁰ Coffin’s tendency to see this as Donne’s problem has been highly influential, with the result that the place of the senses and experience in the ‘Songs and Sonnets’ tends to be elided into the poet’s later, theological, explorations of doubt. However, contemporaries saw it differently; in 1606 Sir Toby Matthew described Donne and associates as ‘mere libertines’.³¹ In ‘Songs and Sonnets’, certainly, doubt is the condition of the poems as events and distinct interpretative frameworks are synthesized and disassembled with a speed calculated to maintain uncertainty. What Coffin sees as Donne’s ultimately resolved problem of doubt and faith, these poems present as an opportunity for troubling, but bravura, explorations of the world and knowledge.

Even if Donne's scepticism was later channelled to debate faith we can productively read early poems as exploring doubt and certainty – what Montaigne called 'experience'.³² Within this, the senses, including the visual sense, play a key role in conveying an immediate set of implications that are ready to be challenged. The eye's evidence is crucial, but to take it at face value would be foolish. Whatever the right answer might be to 'Did we lie downe, because 'twas night?', it is not uncomplicatedly 'Yes' or 'No', though the sensory knowledge of night is helpful in working out the answer.

Although the sermons, offering explicit answers to doubt, tend to focus discussion of Donne's scepticism, we know that Donne read Michel de Montaigne and Agrippa, both of whom explored doubt.³³ The 'nothing' that speaks the 'Nocturnall' tells us that were he a man something would tell him that he was so. This sounds strikingly like the paradox enunciated by Francisco Sanchez: 'I do not even know this – that I know nothing.'³⁴ 'Lecture' and 'Nocturnall' take the senses as the primary location of the sceptical attempt to know the world, using sensory data and accepted cognitive nuggets to evoke a frontline scepticism – scepticism shaped as an encounter with experience. These poetic texts, unlike the sermons, don't provide assessments of scepticism itself or answer doubts. We know about this aspect of Donne's thinking from the sermons. If scepticism names the debate about how and what we know, though, the poems we have considered use the senses and particularly the examples of light and dark and of visual stimulus like shadow, used so often in classical and Renaissance scepticism as the location where problems are experienced. Victoria Kahn's comment on Montaigne's 'recognition of our inability to suspend the activity of judgement in a single and fatal dismantling of the architectonic self' is perhaps more helpful in thinking about Donne's attitude to both the senses and doubt than the pursuit of his theology and logical refutations of doubt in the sermons.³⁵ Donne, too, keeps in play the assertion of the self, and its dismantling – the nothing, 'I am none' of the 'Nocturnall', is an assertion of sense and desire in the world even in the mode of its abolition. There is, then, a connection between Donne's use of the senses in the 'Songs and Sonnets' and the anniversary poems and his later working through of 'doubt'. Yet the distinction between sensory scepticism in 'Lecture' and 'Nocturnall' and the sermons' arguments of doubt is crucial.

So, if we agree that Donne is using the sensory apprehension of night, light and shadow to establish a sceptical poetic practice in these early poems, we can set them against other contemporary writings. The specificity of Donne's use of light, dark and shadow can be seen more clearly in comparison with George Chapman's 'The Shadow of Night' (1594). Chapman's poem's dense obscurity put it at the heart of the 'School of Night' controversy, and has been critically explored in terms of melancholy, as contrasting active and contemplative life or as, simply, obscure.³⁶ The 'Hymnus in Noctem' explores night in terms of

the senses, but also derives substantial sections from Natale Comes's allegorical fables.³⁷

Chapman's showy introduction bids for notice, and the poem promises a trans-valuation of the schema that aligns day and divine power, night and sin, as a time which sends mortals 'bolde reliefe'.³⁸ In its first appearance, un-named except in the title 'Hymnus in Noctem', night brings emotional and sensory respite:

now let humour giue
 Seas to mine eyes, that I may quicklie weepe
 The shipwracke of the world: or let me sleepe
 (Binding my sences) lose my working soule[.]
 (ll. 8–11)

Working with an Aristotelian frame of sense, Chapman imagines sleep as an alternative to the problematic daylight world when:

forth their sundrie roofes of rest,
 All sorts of men, to sorted tasks address.
 Spreade this inferior element: and yield
 Labour his due: the souldier to the field,
 States-men to counsel, Iudges to their pleas,
 Merchants to commerce, mariners to seas:
 All beasts, and birds, the groue and forests range,
 To fill all corners of this round Exchange,
 Till thou (deare Night, o goddesse of most worth),
 Letst thy sweet seas of golden humour forth
 And eagle like dost with thy starrie wings,
 Beate in the foules, and beasts To Somnus lodgings,
 And haughtie Day to the infernall deepe,
 Proclaiming scilence studie, ease, and sleepe.
 (ll. 205–18)

The day initiates work, characterized as drudgery and presses 'tasks' on all men; the very animals must 'groue and forests range' for food. Busy and burdened creatures are saved by the 'starrie wings' of night, sweeping 'haughtie Day' to 'the infernall deepe'. Day is 'driuen' from 'heauen' – 'In hell then let her sit'. In replacing involuntary labour with 'scilence studie, ease, and sleepe', night returns animals and humans to a state presented as both more congenial and truer than the daylight cacophony.

Chapman engages night very differently from Donne in exploring it as a freestanding topic. Initially night is a time which sends mortals 'bolde reliefe', emotional and sensory respite. However, peace ends when 'the gloomy shadow of the night [...] | [...] dims the welkin with her pitchy breath' (Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1.3.1–4), and, like Faustus, the poem's speaking voice begins his incantations:³⁹

Now make him leaue the world to Night and dreames.
 Neuer were vertues labours so enuy'd
 As in this light: shoote, shoote, and stoope his pride:
 Suffer no more his lustfull rayes to get
 The Earth with issue: let him still be set
 In Somnus thickets: bound about the browes,
 VVith pitchie vapours, and with Ebone bowes.
 Rich-tapird sanctuarie of the blest,
 Pallace of Ruth, made all of teares, and rest,
 To thy blacke shades and desolation,
 I consecrate my life; and liuing mone,
 Where furies shall for euer fighting be,
 And adders hisse the world for hating me,
 Foxes shall barke, and Night-rauens belch in grones,
 And owles shall hollow my confusions:
 There will I furnish vp my funerall bed,
 Strewd with the bones and relickes of the dead.
 (ll. 261–77)

Invoking the complete defeat of day, whose 'lustfull rayes', impregnating the whole world, are to be imprisoned in 'Somnus thickets', the speaker consecrates his life to a world of night whose palace, 'sanctuarie of the blest', is now figured as a grotesque charnel house where adders 'hisse the world'. The earlier nirvana-like calm of night gives way to a subjective evocation of a flight to night's 'sanctuarie' motivated by worldly rejection. The vocabulary of the invocation is multisensory, brash and works not by a comprehensive shift of values but by inversion of values from the Doom's moral schema.

If the senses are explicitly allocated to the day under the sign of excess, then the evocation of night as free from the senses is compromised by the poem's rich imagining of a sensorily saturated grotesque cell of night, where the subject resides amongst animal 'barkes', haunted by 'ghosts' unquietly seeking revenge. Apparently invited to join the speaker in the hymn's act of occult worship, in unpoliced shifts between description of repose and fervid advocacy, the reader is invited to 'Come to this house of mourning, serve the night', and when the goddess appears she is busily 'Circkled with charmes' (l. 396) and 'with meteors, comets, lightnings' (l. 400). Thus, once the incantation starts the absence of activity gives way to a forcefully sensory world of night.

In re-evaluating night and darkness Chapman produces a poem that is both intensely visual in its very focus on darkness and inevitably foregrounds the dominance of other sensations at night. The poem is alive with sounds and particularly those of animals inhabiting a world in which their senses are much more sharply attuned than those of humans. In electing to live by night Chapman's speaker is compromised because, as Laurie Shannon puts it, the night belongs to others; to animals, for example, whose senses operate better

without light and whose sounds dominate the world of the night devotee.⁴⁰ Chapman's poem seeks a re-evaluation of night cast in visual terms, but night does not belong to the sight but to the senses that work better at that time – primarily sound and touch. Moreover, for all his attempts to make a new set of values for night, the sensory emphasis of the poem seems to tug the reader towards old associations of the senses – described in medieval times by animals and by visual representations of the human body as a giantly overgrown sense organ (ear, mouth, eye).⁴¹ As night approaches it is visual, but once present the human is partly overwhelmed, as perhaps is Chapman's poem, by a sensory world that operates a different hierarchy.

The night, in Chapman's poem, is visually re-imagined using classical iconography. However, as the incantation starts we see the poem using the sensory and moral schema of day and night and, as the night world invades the poem, we see clearly the ways in which the senses are automatically allocated familiar morality. The icons and sounds of the incantation are imbricated in the value system of the Doom which renders the night torrid rather than a nirvana. Night is the subject's last retreat, but it is now a charnel house:

There will I furnish vp my funerall bed,
 Strewd with the bones and relickes of the dead.
 Atlas shall let th'Olimpick burthen fall,
 To couer my vntombed face withall.
 (ll. 276–79)

We can imagine a specificity to this scene of charnel 'sanctuarie' as a retreat from the world partly conceptualized as a retreat from sense in the only recently redundant chambers and annexes to the pre-Reformation church in which anchorites voluntarily withdrew themselves from the realm of the senses. The anchorite's literal entombment was emphasized by the initiation ceremony's use of light and the administration of extreme unction in which the subject's sense organs were anointed as a token of a reparation and forgiveness before death.⁴² The ceremony explains that, "These things being done, let the grave be opened" and the recluse entered singing, "This shall be my rest for ever", before dust was scattered and the house of enclosure built up.⁴³ The anchorite symbolically relinquished sense. This was a way of life within living memory; in just 1548 we hear of Katherine Man, a former recluse of the Blackfriars, giving up her right to the house in exchange for a pension.⁴⁴

Yet if Chapman's transvaluation of night's associations seems ultimately to be embroiled in the past, and in the very moralized schemes of sense, night and light that it seeks to overthrow, it is also addressing preoccupations of its contemporary world in looking again at sense and sight in its questioning of sight. In registering the value of optics, thinking about sight and sense led to questions of illusion. As Jonathan Hudston discusses, Chapman used the

optical tricks associated with perspective and more specifically the viewer's perspective.⁴⁵ In *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (1591) the fountain described at the start is:

So cunningly to optic reason wrought
That farre of, it showed a woman's face,
Heavie and weeping but more neerely viewed,
Not weeping, heavy, nor a woman shewed[.]
(III. 24–27)⁴⁶

One way to think about 'Hymnus in Noctem' is as developing such a comparative game into a prolonged exploration of the senses at night and rule at night. In a different mode, 'Hymnus in Noctem' also presents the world as a question of 'optic reason' or perspective and set alongside these other versions of changed visuality, or perspective, showing a 'truer' situation.

In 'Hymnus in Noctem' night is not simply a perspectival puzzle in which knowledge is disrupted through visual effects, but is drawn out from the point of view of a devotee of the night. If the speaker recalls the anchorite, the poem also recalls the world of optic unreliability. Given that 'day, or light' does 'but serve the eye' which 'enflames the heart, and learns the soule abuse' (ll. 362–65), the visual sense itself must be reformed if the night is to be seen in its true form. As Jacqueline Watson reminds us in this volume, sight was in theory the highest of the senses but was also very likely to lead a viewer astray. 'The Shadow of Night' addresses this situation on terrain that is in some ways surprisingly close to Donne's. Where it seems, then, that Donne is exploring night philosophically whereas Chapman is, perhaps quixotically, attempting to investigate night itself from the point of view of a passionate bid for re-evaluation, a more complex situation is suggested by this comparison of the two poems. If Donne explored light, night and shadow as a ground of thought, Chapman follows through a re-evaluation of night and explores the sensory stumbling blocks to full human possession of that world. In doing so, his work, too, leads us back to the grounds of knowledge from the distinct vantage point of faith as it encounters the unreliability of sensory apprehension. As *The Skeptick*, a version of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* tells us, paintings can appear to sight in one way, 'but to the touch they seem not to be so' – the very senses cannot agree on how we know the world, and Chapman's poem recognizes faith's struggle with this.⁴⁷

Finally, how can we set Donne and Chapman's worlds of night, light and shadow in relation to the large questions with which we opened – of Reformation, knowledge, and, potentially, sensory change? If we return, for a moment, to the world of the Doom, here is a medieval summary of the senses at work:

Kepe well x and flee from VII
Rule well V and come to Heaven.⁴⁸

It is clear that this is not describing Donne and Chapman's sensory world, but it allows us to see the problem of how to investigate the sensory aspects of a changing world. As Alain Corbin suggests, the 'sensory environment' has changed massively, but finding methods to track that change is complex. Corbin argues that at moments of conflict, 'abrupt confrontations of systems of perception' illuminate sensory change.⁴⁹ For sight, then, key moments might be street-lights, the growth of cities, legislation for brick buildings, changes in labour, and Koslofsky writes a part of that as an epochal story. However, approaching Corbin's problem of a paucity of textual records, it is also possible to put together different kinds of evidence. Thus, that *The Skeptick* was circulating in the 1590s is an indication of vernacular debate on the role of the senses, and sensory experience, in producing knowledge. The writing is much more exemplary than a modern philosophical text and even, to a limited extent, shares with poetry the quality of an 'essay' testing elaborations on evidence. At the same time, in the poems analysed, both Donne and Chapman seem to investigate and use the implications of the 'old', Catholic world of night. With the Reformation, of course, the mapping of time on to the life of Christ, the hours, was superseded.

We can, then, see a link between Reformation and a potential change in the 'sensory environment'. The dark and light of the hours was reshaped by morning and evening prayer, with evening prayer linking God and light with the 'peace' of evening. The emergence of a labouring day and religious change are, it seems, marked together in the very texts of the church as the *Book of Common Prayer* formalizes 'Morning' and 'Evening' prayer. The day marked by morning and evening prayer represents a dedication of temporal and sensory being clearly as forceful as Corbin's points of conflict, and every bit as complex in terms of the questions it suggests about change driven 'top down' or 'bottom up'. These markers of time and light bring with them questions of sleep and labour, the potential reinvention of a role for the senses in 'evening', a time to become so important in eighteenth-century writing on the self. What the distinct orientations towards sensory knowledge found in the poetry of Donne and Chapman may suggest is that when thinking again about the sensory environment, texts from a range of different precincts of culture, not only those telling directly of sense experience, allow us to track hints of sensory worlds at particular moments, not only in epochal sweeps. And, above all, conceptual and sensory change are bound together, albeit in enigmatic ways.

Notes

- 1 For images of the Doom see www.wenhaston.net/doom/ [accessed 1 July 2013].
- 2 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_2/ [accessed 23 July 2014]; *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1968), p. 118.
- 3 Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1–2; on ‘segmented’ sleep, see p. 6.
- 4 R.C. Bald, ‘Donne’s Will’, in *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 563–67 (pp. 563–64).
- 5 G.F. Waller, ‘John Donne’s Changing Attitudes to Time’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 14.1 (1974), 79–89; Theresa M. DiPasquale, ‘From Here to Aeviternity: Donne’s Atemporal Clocks’, *Modern Philology*, 110.2 (2012), 226–52.
- 6 William M. Hamlin, ‘A Lost Translation Found? An Edition of *The Skeptick* (c. 1590) Based on Extant Manuscripts’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 31.1 (2001), 34–51 (p. 42).
- 7 The earliest may be Edward Dowden, ‘The Poetry of John Donne’, in *New Studies in Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), pp. 90–120 (pp. 105–6). See John T. Shawcross (ed.), *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor, 1967) p. 410n; see also the discussion of explication of the shadows in Roger Cognard, ‘The Solstice Metaphor in Donne’s “Lecture Upon the Shadow”’, *Essays in Literature*, 7.1 (1980), 11–20 (pp. 12–13).
- 8 John Donne, ‘Lecture Upon the Shadow’, in *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. by Shawcross, pp. 86–87. All references to Donne’s poems follow Shawcross, with line numbers hereafter cited in the text.
- 9 Christopher Bardt, ‘Constructing Light’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 58.2 (2004), 14–18 (p. 14).
- 10 Thomas Fale, *Horologiographia* (1652), A2r.
- 11 See also DiPasquale, p. 431.
- 12 See Alison R. Reike, ‘Donne’s Riddles’, *Journal of English and German Philology*, 83.1 (1984), 1–20.
- 13 In ‘Problem X’, Donne explores Venus and shadow using a strikingly similar vocabulary of Venus (John Donne, *Problems and Paradoxes*, ed. by Helen Peters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) pp. 33–35).
- 14 ‘The system of planetary hours divided daylight hours into 12 equal parts and the night also into 12 equal parts. Thus the length of the hours varied through the seasons as the days grew longer or shorter, and daylight hours were only the same length as night hours at the two equinoxes.’ Hester Higton, *Sundials at Greenwich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and National Maritime Museum, 2002), p. 448.
- 15 Fale, L4v; ‘the placing of the houres unequall’, N3v.
- 16 Fale, O4r.
- 17 See Michael R. Matthews, *Time For Science Education* (New York: Plenum, 2000), pp. 49–50.
- 18 See Cognard.
- 19 Shawcross (ed.), p. 402n.

- 20 The material on the shadow in painting works follows the discussion of Victor I. Stoichita in *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion, 1997), pp. 42–67. Pliny, *Natural History* (London: Loeb, 1952), p. 43 (xxxv.15), quoted in Stoichita, p. 11.
- 21 Quoted in Stoichita, p. 42.
- 22 See Stoichita, pp. 42–43.
- 23 See Bartolomé Estebán Murillo, *The Origin of Painting* (1660–65). Tim Noble and Sue Webster's work, see www.timnobleandsuewebster.com/artwerks.html [accessed 6 September 2013]; www.timnobleandsuewebster.com/metal_fucking_rats_2006.html [accessed 6 September 2013]; and, Youngman www.timnobleandsuewebster.com/youngman_2012.html [accessed 6 September 2013].
- 24 See Marjorie Hope-Nicolson, 'Kepler, The *Somnium*, and John Donne', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1.3 (1940), 259–80 (p. 268).
- 25 John Donne, *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611; repr. Amsterdam and Norwood, NJ: Walter Johnson, 1977), p. 2; Marjorie Hope-Nicolson, *passim*.
- 26 Hope-Nicolson, pp. 268–71.
- 27 Shawcross, pp. 276–86.
- 28 Shawcross, p. 106; see DiPasquale, *passim*.
- 29 Charles Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 283.
- 30 Coffin, *John Donne*, p. 284. See e.g. Kenneth Gross, 'John Donne's Lyric Skepticism: In Strange Way', *Modern Philology*, 101.3 (2004), 371–99: 'even if the poems compel and indulge [...] suspicion they are wise enough to let us know that we cannot stop there. Love is at the limit, and a continual promise' (p. 399).
- 31 Sir Toby Matthew, *A True Historical Relation of the Conversion of Sir Tobie Matthem*, ed. by A.H. Matthew (1904), pp. 90–91; quoted in Bald, pp. 188–89.
- 32 Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Experience', in *Essays*, trans. by John Florio, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1921; repr. 1938), III, 322–86.
- 33 Don Cameron Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea* (New York: Arno, 1979), pp. 115–19; Bald, p. 2.
- 34 See Allen, pp. 77–78.
- 35 Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 151.
- 36 Frances Yates, *Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979; repr 2001), pp. 171–75.
- 37 *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, trans. and annotated by John Mulryan and Steven Brown, 2 vols, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 316 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).
- 38 All references and line numbering for 'Hymnus in Noctem' are to George Chapman, *Plays and Poems*, ed. by Jonathan Hudston (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 223–37. The text is from *The Shaddow of night containing two poetickall hymnes* (1594), STC 190:16.
- 39 Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* ed. by J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
- 40 Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 174.

- 41 See Carl Nordenfalk, 'The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 48 (1985), 1–22.
- 42 Nordenfalk, p. 3.
- 43 Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914), pp. 76, 94–98.
- 44 Francesca M. Steele, *Anchoresses of the West* (Derby, Darley Dale: no pub., 1903), p. 100.
- 45 See Hudston (ed.), p. xvii; see also discussion pp. xxxii–xxxiii, n. 6. See *Hero and Leander*, III, 125–26, quoted in Hudston (ed.), p. xxii.
- 46 Quoted in Jonathan Hudston, 'Introduction', in Chapman, *Plays and Poems*, see also discussion pp. xxxii–xxxiii, n. 6. See *Hero and Leander*, III, 125–26, quoted in Hudston, 'Introduction', p. xxii.
- 47 Hamlin, p. 50.
- 48 *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 80; quoted in Nordenfalk, p. 4.
- 49 Alain Corbin, 'A History and Anthropology of the Senses', in *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 181–95 (p. 183).