The Museum of Melancholy

The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1585-1625

By C.L. Dawson

CasaColori Local History Pamphlets

In the early 1600s, Mrs Joan Drake is married to Francis Drake (godson of the great explorer) and lives in Esher Place in Surrey, previously owned by Cardinal Wolsey. They should be leading a charmed life, but she suffers from a deep melancholy that manifests itself in both physical symptoms and a spiritual anxiety. Seeking a cure, Dr John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, arranges for a series of Puritan preachers to take on her 'case' and as the years pass finds himself inexorably drawn into Mrs Drake's confidence.

Based on the long-forgotten book Hart published in 1647, some twenty years after her death, and three letters of his that have survived, this is a true account of Mrs Drake's final years in which, despite the occasional quarrel, she involves him in a secret plan to help her escape — whilst pregnant with her last, ill-fated child — and makes a heartbreaking confession to him on her deathbed. Written as a spiritual guide but concealing a memoir, Hart's wonderful phrasing and bygone vocabulary form a testament of his devotion, tantalisingly debatable if it was reciprocated or unrequited, but which ultimately proved deadly. Although the events took place four hundred years ago, the issues still resonate: an intelligent and strong-willed woman struggling with her physical and mental wellbeing, and resolutely combatting the established social norms and religious dogma.

This book is a companion piece to the real-life story of her husband's traumatic early life in 'Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1615'. Together, these provide a rare insight into an imperfect early modern marriage.

The Museum of Melancholy:

The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1585-1625

A True Account of the Suffering and Redemption of Mrs Joan Drake (née Tothill) of Esher, Walton-on-Thames and Shardeloes near Amersham.

By C. L. Dawson

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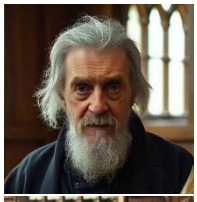
Brief Lives[1]

Mrs Joan Drake 1585-1625
Daughter and co-heiress of William Tothill of Shardeloes near Amersham. In 1603, aged 18, she married Francis Drake of Esher with whom she had four children: William, Francis, Joan and John. From 1615, she suffered from melancholy and spiritual anxiety, and her 'case' became widely publicised.

Francis Drake, Esquire of Esher 1580-1634
Lord of the Manor of Walton-on-Thames, who lived at Esher Place[2] in Surrey. He was the godson of Sir Francis Drake and a Puritan who supported nonconformist ministers.

Dr John Hart (dates unknown)
A Doctor of Divinity and Puritan who heard about Mrs Drake's struggles in 1616 and orchestrated her cure over a decade, using a network of Puritan divines. He later wrote a spiritual guide, published in 1647, in which he included a memoir of Mrs Drake's final years based on his role as her adviser and confidant. Three letters of his mentioning Mrs Drake also survive.



John Dod 1549-1645
A celebrated Puritan divine, preacher and writer who was noted for his patient and meek manner. He was 'silenced' by church authorities as a nonconformist, and in his late sixties spent several years attempting to cure Mrs Drake, and others.

William Drake 1606-1669
Eldest son of Francis and Joan Drake who attended Christ Church, Oxford in 1623-26. In later life, he became Sir William Drake, 1st Baronet of Shardeloes. A large collection of his diaries and commonplace books was discovered at Shardeloes in the 1940s.

[1] No portraits have survived, so the images above and throughout are illustrative.

[2] This house beside the River Mole, which had been a palace of the Bishops of Winchester before the Reformation, was probably known simply as Esher Manor House in Francis's time (Aubrey referred to it as 'Esher House' in the 1670s; see p85). Wayneflete Tower, which still stands near the river, was originally its gatehouse. The earliest surviving record of the name Esher Place, following modification of the buildings by later owners, is on a 1709 engraving by Johannes Kip. Today's house on the hill is a later building.

Introduction: Secular Sentences

Entering Mr Pilkington's bookshop next to the Red Lion Inn in Fleet Street in 1647, a reader in search of an uplifting spiritual story could have bought a copy of Dr John Hart's newly published work "Trodden Down Strength, or Mrs Drake Revived". The author, a Doctor of Divinity, had dithered for twenty-two years after the incidents which he related until he took the manuscript to the printers, possibly because that same year the last of those closest to Mrs Drake, who might have questioned his version of events, had died.

Editions of his book, reprinted at least into the late eighteenth century, now gather dust deep within the recesses of a few physical libraries and antiquarian bookshops, and remain devoid of 'views' and 'ratings' in digital archives. John Hart's archaic language and lengthy scriptural commentaries put

up an insurmountable barrier to most casual, non-religious readers, and the focus on an unknown, wealthy woman living in Cardinal Wolsey's former home in the Surrey countryside four hundred years ago, does not sound as though it would contain those elements that tend to drive a narrative forward, such as the arc of a lifetime filled with struggles and jeopardy that is finally resolved with a joyful ending. And yet it does. Extracting Mrs Drake's true story from the musty pages, and teasing out the secular sentences to reveal Hart's wonderful phrasing and forgotten vocabulary, you are left with a quite different work, accessible to the modern world. He becomes quotable again: there is tragedy, suffering and pathos; and misunderstandings, dramatic moments and possibly a love story — tantalisingly debatable if it is reciprocated or unrequited.

Prologue: Blackfriars Theatre 1610

'…in her thoughts likening him [Mr Dod] unto Ananias, one whom at a play in the Black-Friars she saw scoffed at…'

In the autumn of 1610, the Drakes of Esher Place went to the opening night of 'The Alchemist' by Ben Jonson at the Blackfriars Theatre in London, which was the winter home of the performers, the King's Men. Although somewhat smaller than the company's other theatre, the Globe, it had a roof which meant that plays could be performed in all weathers, and its location on the north bank of the Thames, just inside the City walls, meant that they could attract a more sophisticated audience, with the higher cost of tickets balancing out the lower capacity[3]. The best seats in the house were in the boxes that looked down directly onto the stage, providing an uninterrupted view of the play from

[3] The audience of Blackfriars Theatre was in the hundreds compared to the 2,500-3,000 capacity at the Globe. However, ticket prices at the Blackfriars were five to six times higher (6d. to 2s. 6d) than at the Globe (1d. to 6d).

the wings, and Mrs Joan Drake would have felt almost part of the performance as she watched the action unfold a few feet away. Unlike what she had heard said of the Globe, where there was a constant cacophony and milling of the crowds, here she could hear each word enounced and see each nuance of the players' expressions; and these were the most celebrated actors of the era, among them Richard Burbage[4] playing the lead role of the alchemist, and Henry Condell[5] as a character called Surly. Somewhere behind the scenes was William Shakespeare[6], as the same troupe was putting on Othello the next day, and Mrs Drake was so close to the backstage that she probably caught an occasional glimpse of him.

The play was particularly engaging as the action took place in a contemporary setting, in the area of wealthy Blackfriars itself during an outbreak of plague, and by unfortunate coincidence the theatre had only just re-opened after being closed for several months due to plague in London. Despite this bleak background, The Alchemist was an action-packed farce, with a constant movement of characters on and off the small candle-lit stage, that required all her attention as the plot unfolded. The storyline began with a trio of con-artists: a manservant called Face, left in charge of a grand house in the absence of his master who has fled because of the epidemic; a fraudulent alchemist named Subtle; and Doll Common, a woman of dubious repute. They have devised a scheme to deprive gullible citizens of their wealth using the age-old lure of the Philosophers Stone that can turn base metals into gold. Among

[4] Richard Burbage was the most famous actor of the Shakespearean stage, as well as being part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres.
[5]Henry Condell along with John Heminges, another actor from the King's Men, edited the First Folio of Shakespeare's works in 1623.
[6] Shakespeare part-owned the Blackfriars Theatre. He stopped writing plays around 1612 and is believed to have returned to Stratford by 1613, where he died in 1616.

those seeking riches are a pair of Anabaptists — extreme 'separatist' Puritans[7] — who are interested in purchasing some suitable items belonging to orphans (but only if their deceased parents were not Anabaptists) at a knock-down price to turn into gold, which they plan to use to convert more people to their religious views. The junior Puritan, Ananias[8], is a deacon from Amsterdam whose over-zealous views and behaviour is much mocked. He is dressed in a plain hat and a small ruff, and derides Surly, disguised as a Spanish Don and dressed in the currently fashionable Spanish-style (and therefore suspiciously Catholic) clothing, calling his breeches *'superstitious and idolatrous'*, criticising his headwear in which *'thou looks like the anti-Christ in that lewd hat'* , and pointing to his '*huge ruff of pride'*; and he insists on interrupting and correcting Subtle's language, suggesting he use *'Christ-tide'* for *'Christmas'* since 'mass' sounds Popish. The actor playing Ananias[9] exaggerated the supposed verbal tics and holier-than-thou visage of the Puritans, and now and again burst forth with rantings in the style of an Old Testament prophet. Satire abounds, but a great deal of it was heaped on the hypocrisy of the rigid and self-righteous Anabaptists as they convince themselves that stealing from orphans and counterfeiting money (which they claim is not *'coining'* but *'casting'*) is entirely within their religious laws, as long as it is done in a spirit of *'godliness'*. This is confirmed by a supposed *'revelation of the truth'* by the Holy Spirit which is clearly no more than a spurious justification of self-interest. Subtle adds fuel to the fire by suggesting that they could use their ill-gotten gains to address some of the downsides of Puritanism, such as the endless, longwinded

[7] Puritans were generally divided into those who sought change from within the Church of England, and those 'separatists' who formed their own independent local churches.
[8] The name Ananias references a character from the New Testament who lied to the Apostles about profits he had made from selling land, keeping a portion for himself, and was struck dead by God for his greed.
[9] Nicholas Tooley.

services, and their sense of superiority of being chosen specifically by God as the elect or *'those of us who have the seal'*[10]. Finally, in an ironic tone, Subtle hints that they might even cease their opposition to the enjoyment of life's pleasures, such as their abhorrence of the theatre.

Of course, nothing goes to plan, and towards the end of the play the alchemist's equipment over-heats and explodes off stage with a loud blast, that must have given those seated in the nearby boxes a tremendous shock. The Anabaptists are not the only caricatures pilloried by Ben Jonson, with their vices or trade indicated by their names: there is Sir Epicure Mammon, obsessed with money, gluttony and ways to improve his sexual prowess; Dapper, a lowly legal clerk looking for a sure-fire method to win at cards and gambling so that he can climb the social ladder; an angry youth, Kastril[11], keen to learn the art of rhetoric but comically ill-educated and inept; Dame Pliant (Kastril's sister who he mistreats), a rich but witless widow; and Drugger, a trader who sells the best tobacco in town and wants to guarantee the success of his new shop, and who is soon deprived of his worldly goods. However, there is no doubt that the Anabaptists (Ananias and his elder pastor, Tribulation Wholesome) are the ones to which Jonson's main message is most applicable — that fanaticism and excess of zeal, if not bounded by reason, lead to extremism, corruption, greed, hypocrisy and ultimately self-destruction. That they are themselves taken in by conmen is not meant to go unnoticed.

Mrs Drake's husband, Francis Drake, seated next to her, was a Puritan sympathiser and must have been squirming in his seat, trying to suppress his

[10] From the 'seven seals' in Revelation that reveal divine judgment intertwined with redemption
[11] Or Kestrel, the bird of prey.

anger. He would not have been the only one if the reaction of Henry Jackson[12], who had seen the play performed in Oxford a few weeks previously in September 1610, is anything to go by. Writing to a friend afterwards in Latin, he noted that the play was a success *'with the greatest applause and the theatre full',* but that the *'king's stage players'* had made the more strait-laced audience members uncomfortable as they had *'justly struck pious and learned men as impious, because not content to hit at the alchemists, they most foully besmirched Holy Writ itself. That is, they taunted the Anabaptists, as if improbity[13] hid behind this mask'*. He observed that of all the characters ribbed mercilessly it was the Anabaptists who received the most laughter and *'our theatre never rang with greater applause than when that hypocritical buffoon made his entrance, who, to hold up the false sanctity of the Anabaptists before the spectators as an object of derision, impiously and monstrously sullied Scripture'*. Despite this, *'our clergymen (I am ashamed to say) most eagerly were gathered together'.*

In Blackfriars, the play drew to a close. Mrs Drake was twenty-five years old and in her prime, and this is how those catching a glimpse of her during the performance from the wooden benches in the auditorium would remember her — a petite and pretty woman in her finest clothes, laughing merrily at the satirical escapades and leaning in towards her stern-looking husband to encourage him to join in the fun.

[12] Henry Jackson was a 24-year-old scholar from Corpus Christi College, Oxford; he also mentions seeing Desdemona in Shakespeare's Othello the night after as 'they also had tragedies, which they acted with decorum and fitness. In these they elicited tears not only with their speaking but also with their physical action'.

[13] Improbity: lack of honesty and moral integrity.

PART 1: Life and Death

The Unpardonable Sin

'…but not long after [she] fell out into terrible shrieks & cried out to this purpose, that she was undone, she was damned, and a cast away, and so of necessity must needs go to Hell.'

Being introduced to Mrs Joan Drake in 1615, you would encounter a small woman of around thirty, *'of a low well-compacted stature, of a lovely brown complexion, having a full nimble quick sparrow-hawk eye'*[14], who was by nature jovial, courteous and affable in conversation, with a quick wit. She was inquisitive and had a good memory, and was noted for plain speaking, but if crossed she could be stubborn, stern and resolute, yet in a modest and inoffensive way. She valued goodness in people, whether noble born or not, and detested hypocrisy, making fun of some of those she considered all show and no substance.

Getting to know her better, becoming her confidant, she would tell you that she was over-indulged as a child, and that she did not agree with the match arranged by her father William Tothill of Shardeloes, one of the Six Clerks of the Court of Chancery, with the son of Richard Drake of Esher Place, a Groom of the Privy Chamber to Elizabeth 1, a courtly connection that might explain the marriage contract[15]. One of the reasons for her reluctance may have been simply a lack of attraction, as she admitted he was a man *'whom at first she could not affect'*; another may have been his religious fervour, since at that time *'she was*

[14] Note: Quotes in italics are taken from John Hart's book, updated into modern spelling but retaining the original words.

[15] William Tothill and Richard Drake may have become acquainted at court, as in his will in July 1603, Richard called William, who signed as a witness, 'a friend' and appointed him an overseer.

not acquainted with the power of godliness'. That her new husband was in the midst of a lengthy legal battle with the heirs of Sir Francis Drake[16], which threatened the financial security of the household, was another likely cause of her apprehension. Despite this, the wedding to Francis Drake, godson of the great explorer, took place on the 3rd of March 1603 at St. Dunstan-in-the-West on Fleet Street, which was conveniently situated between Chancery Lane, where William had his offices, and Fetter Lane, where Richard maintained a London residence. That contrast — from spoilt child to marriage against her will — and the pressure of remaining outwardly the obedient and dutiful daughter, was the first occasion that she began to feel the *'storms and tempests'* in her mind, so that below the façade of mirth she maintained with friends, and the leisure pursuits she sought to take her mind off her marriage woes, she developed a deep sadness. If you had to describe her demeanour, you might say she that she possessed a melancholic charisma.

It was the birth of her third child, her daughter also named Joan, sometime around 1615[17], that seemed to trigger more sinister symptoms. During the delivery she was *'much wronged by the midwife, and she was ever after troubled with fumes and scurvy[18] vapours mounting up unto her head'* which

[16] The legal arguments relating to the codicil of Sir Francis Drake's will had been going on for some years, until the final case in 1605 at the Court of the Exchequer. The original documents are in the National Archive: Drake vs Drake 1605 (E133473; E133474; E133475); these have been transcribed by the author and a written as a separate article 'Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1606'. See https://casacolori.co.uk/

[17] The date is based on Dr Hart's statement that Mrs Drake's problems began in earnest after this birth, and that her troubles lasted ten years (she died in 1625). Joan Drake was the only daughter, so it is assumed that this birth refers to her, although her birth date is not recorded. However, this does not fully align with another of Hart's statements of the birth being 'not long after her marriage'.

[18] Scurvy in its archaic and figurative meaning of unhealthy or vile.

gave her a continual headache, like a migraine, and a fire burning in her stomach[19], that no doctor could find a remedy for.

During her lying-in, as her discontent increased, her mother came to stay in Esher Place, where one night Mrs Drake woke up shrieking and screaming that she had committed the Unpardonable Sin[20] and that she was *'damned, and a cast away, and so of necessity must needs go to Hell'*, after which she shook with fear, and began to weep uncontrollably. However, having fallen back to sleep, she then reawakened later in an ecstatic mood, saying that an angel had come to her in a dream and assured her of salvation.

This pattern of terror and joy continued, combined with strange utterings and occasional manic laughter, and her movements became more

[19] Elizabeth Hunter notes that according to the medical theory of the time, uterine disorders were associated with these symptoms, and could be caused by excessive passions such as grief, anger, jealousy, or by sexual frustration. See: Hunter, E. (2012). Melancholy and the doctrine of reprobation in English puritan culture, 1550-1640 [PhD thesis]. Oxford University, UK. p. 185.

[20] The Unpardonable Sin is the rejection of God, and is also called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

violent so that it was agreed that she should not be left alone, by night or day, in case she harmed herself. The bolts were taken off the doors so that she could not lock herself in, and two gentlewomen were hired to take turns to look after her. Confinement and being constantly watched over did little to alleviate Mrs Drake's situation. No longer permitted to spend much time with her children, or to ride in the fresh air, she began to lose interest in life and its pleasures. Despite being practically bed-ridden, she slept poorly, often waking from nightmares, and had little energy when she was awake, and she lost her appetite.

Melancholy, the black bile, had been a recognised condition since Hippocrates in the fifth century BCE, but medicine had made insufficient progress since then to be of much use to Mrs Drake. The only other route available to her anguished husband and parents, to try and counteract the physical symptoms of her unbearable anxiety over the condition of her eternal state, was the spiritual one.

Francis Drake was a Puritan, his views most likely stemming from his mother's family, the Staffords[21], who had been refugees — Marian exiles — in Geneva with John Calvin[22]. As fate would have it, John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, had been at a dinner in Isleworth at the home of Mrs Scudamore[23], estranged wife of an MP, when he first heard of Mrs Drake's ill health from a fellow guest, Dr John Burges, a Puritan and physician who had met (and been

[21] Sir William Stafford (whose first wife was Mary Boleyn) and Dorothy Stafford. They had the same surname because they were cousins.

[22] Francis Drake of Esher's mother was born Ursula Stafford. The Stafford family — Sir William and Dorothy (possibly about to give birth to another daughter, Elizabeth), and their children Edward (aged 3), Ursula (2), William (1), their servants, and a cousin, Elizabeth Sandys — were listed in 1555 in Geneva in the 'Livre des Anglais' (the English Book) which recorded the names of the English community of around 140 households. Their son, John Stafford, was born in Geneva in January 1556, with Calvin as godfather. The British version of Calvinism known as the Reformed tradition, was referred to as Puritanism from the early 1560s. See: Hall, History of the Puritans, p. 110.

[23] Lady Scudamore – Mary Throckmorton (c. 1570-1632) – c. 46 in 1616

rejected) by her. In discussion, the name of John Dod[24] came up as the preacher most suitable *'with his mild, meek and merciful spirit'* to help the afflicted woman. During the next fortnight this conversation played upon Hart's mind (and maybe he saw an opportunity to boost his own reputation and career) to such an extent that discovering John Dod was in London, he put the proposition personally to him who, modestly claiming it was beyond his powers, nevertheless agreed to an introduction. Hart next wrote an unsolicited letter from his rooms in Whitefriars to Francis Drake in which he informed him that, hearing of the danger his wife was in, and out of mercy to her, he had procured *'the fittest man known to come to see her, and do his best to help her according to his ability'*. Asking his acquaintances for confirmation, the profile of Mr Dod presented to Drake was of a well-regarded Puritan divine noted for his patience, who although in his mid-sixties and having just recovered from an extreme bodily affliction that had almost put him in his grave, was currently free of responsibilities, and income, as he had been 'silenced' and barred from public preaching for non-conformity to the Church of England practices.

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In 1616, John Hart and John Dod, as invited guests, left their horses in the stable yard and stood before the towering red brick gatehouse of Esher Place[25]. The cluster of buildings close to the banks of the river Mole, that had once belonged to Cardinal Wolsey, had been visible from the top of the hill as they approached, and as befitted his status gave the impression of a compact Tudor palace with a four-storey 'castle-like'[26] main building complete with

[24] John Dod (1549-1645) was a celebrated Puritan divine, known as 'Decalogue Dod'.
[25] Known as Wayneflete Tower, this is the only part of the old Esher Place that still remains.
[26] This description comes from John Aubrey, the antiquary, who recorded visiting Esher Place in 1673 as part of his 'Perambulation of Surrey' which is in the Bodleian library.

turrets at its core, plus a bishop's chapel[27]. This was surrounded by formal gardens, a 'pond garden', and orchards set in acres of parkland and woods ideal for riding and hunting. The two visitors were led across the courtyard to the entrance porch then through the Great Hall, marvelling at the stained-glass windows and hammerbeam ceiling where intricate angels had been carved into the wooden beams, and up into the main lodgings. As they were ushered in to the Great Chamber of the castle keep, there was a commotion where they could see Mrs Drake hurrying up the stairs '*whereupon her husband took the great iron fork [from the fireplace] in his hand, and run up after her, threatening to beat down the door, if she would not open it'*.

It would turn out that, unaware of any visitors, she had spotted two sober gentlemen approaching from the windows of the dining room, run up to

[27] Treswell's map does show a 'chapel' according to 'The Accounts for the Manor of Esher in the Winchester Pipe Rolls 1235-1376' Ed David Stones; Surrey Record Society Vol XLVI, published in 2017: '…it is intriguing that it shows a building similar to the purported appearance of the thirteenth-century chapel and set in its own enclosure to the south of the manorial centre.'

her bedroom and tried to shut herself in. John Dod was called for, and as was his custom, he knelt in her presence and began to pray. Hart and Drake did likewise, but Mrs Drake stayed standing. She remained silent throughout dinner, as Mr Dod spoke about his experiences of dealing with similar cases. Persuaded to stay the night, Dod was asked by Francis Drake as he was being shown to his room, what he thought so far, to which he replied that all had gone to plan *'because the Devil was afraid, run away, and durst not stand to it'.*

Over the next few days, the opening positions became clear. Mrs Drake's conviction was that she had rejected God, and in doing so was *'a damned Reprobate*[28] *who would go to hell forever'*. It was therefore needless, fruitless, and in vain for anyone to lose time or effort trying to help her. Instead, she was *'quite destitute of all natural affection unto Husband, Father, Mother, Children, and everybody else, having in brief no love either to God or man'* and just wanted to be left alone. Pitifully, since there was never a chance that it was going to happen, she *'resolved to spend the remainder of her time in jollying and merriment, denying herself no worldly comforts'* since she was already damned.

For his part, Mr Dod was convinced that he was not conversing with the woman before him, but with a far trickier opponent — the Devil himself. Had he been of a different nature, he might have suspected witchcraft and gone in search of the source in the village, but instead he listened to her confronting his arguments with counterarguments, that could only be *'the Devil's rhetoric being used nimbly and strongly against him'.* The more he spoke, the more astute her objections became. This was not the ordinary Devil he had happened

[28] In Calvinism, a sinner who is not of the elect and is predestined to damnation.

upon, but a clever and *'sophisticated logician'* that would test his skills to the limit.

Their relationship, observed it would appear at all times by John Hart, settled into a pattern. He would make speeches and she would laugh and jest in derision at all his fine words. She seemed to gain great enjoyment from disturbing him at private prayer, throwing open the door to his room and threatening to strike him with a staff or to fling herself down the stairs if he did not stop. In private, she had revealed to Dr Hart that she could not take Mr Dod seriously, as he reminded her of the character of Ananias that she remembered from a play she had seen at Blackfriars a few years previously. But throughout her antics, which he took to be *'the Devil changing his posture and weapons'*, Mr Dod would look pitifully upon her but would never raise his voice.

Despite her confrontations with the in-house preacher, Mrs Drake was hedging her bets; she may have been searching for an alternative, less zealous and all-engulfing method. Behind his back she was in touch with other ministers

of her own choice, anxious for second opinions on whether a creature such as herself — whose heart was *'as hard as an anvil'*[29] — had any hope of going to Heaven? Nothing was committed to paper; she sent out her waiting-woman, who she trusted to ask questions using the correct phrasing she instructed her with, and commit to memory the responses. She received much favourable encouragement, which she was careful to keep to herself for succour in trying moments.

The elderly Mr Dod was understandably worn out after a month, and announced he would be leaving, to which Mrs Drake looked directly at him and gave him *'a rude farewell'* that he should go and never return, asking him what manner of religious man he was that he would leave his calling, home and family to be with her, where he was an unwelcome intruder? Mr Dod, showing the first and only small sign of impatience, replied that he was *'very sensible of her reproof and dismissal, and therefore meant hereafter to stay at home, and look unto his own matters, not troubling her anymore'*. However, *'she inwardly very sorry for what was done'*, on the day of his departure she took him aside and spoke to him in private, which meant that Dr Hart, who was still at all times poised with his pen, was unable to record the conversation, except that Mr Dod muttered that he would consult with God.

Mr Dod stayed away a month, but would not admit defeat and came back, then went again when he was fatigued, doing this several times in succession until a period of three years had passed and it was 1619 with no change in the status quo *'with the same arguments stiffly maintained over and*

[29] Hard-hearted, in the Biblical sense, is an obstinate and calloused heart that fails to respond to God or obey Him.

over again, a hundred times together without her being persuaded to come to Church or Sacrament…but carried herself as a desperate forlorn creature'.

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It was decided that a new approach should be taken. This involved not showing frustration with her, or constantly urging her to go to church, but instead going along with wherever her spirit took her, and encouraging her with kind words, so that, in the end, a true picture of how the Devil had taken hold of her might emerge, since up until now he was constantly shape-shifting in response to their attacks. Mr Dod came up with an analogy: that this would avoid the errors like those of an unskilled physician who *'gives physick before they know the ground of the disease; who many times in place of curing, do another kill, or so much more ulcer their wounds'*. The tactic did on occasion appear to work, as her moods lightened and she would sometimes smile and laugh, but Hart admitted that even in the midst of this laughter, her heart was sad, and in private not long after they would hear *'sore fits of weeping'*.

Needing to recuperate once more, Mr Dod resolved to depart for a longer period to give her time to ruminate on what had been achieved. Paradoxically, in his absence (although Hart notes that there were *'divers worthy ministers'* who visited, but he does not name), Mrs Drake's moods darkened and led to desperation and stirrings of self-harm. It was winter and she blamed herself for any unfortunate events *'…that the great snow, and all the disastrous direful events happening abroad anywhere, she was guilty of them, and that things would never be better so long as she were alive.'* At mealtimes, she would hide a knife in a napkin, and then slip it up the inside of her sleeve, until this habit was noticed and remedial steps taken. On one occasion, she

swallowed a handful of pins, which fortunately passed through her without harm; on another, she sent out her maid to buy forty oranges, with the expectation of dying from dysentery[30], but instead *'these proved excellent medicines unto her, purging away abundance of black ugly filthy matter, which made her to look much better'*. Francis Drake and the Tothills were bewildered and alarmed, and sought further help.

Hart does not say in his book how contact was made in around 1619 with Dr James Ussher, who was then Vice-Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, having previously been Professor of Theological Controversies. Ussher was already a noted scholar and linguist, and *'a magazine of all knowledge and learning…with his infinite reading'* who had embarked on the research for his life's work which was to write a history of the classical world from its creation, as described in Genesis, to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ[31]. Frustratingly, the university library in Dublin only contained forty books, so that he was forced to travel to England regularly to visit the great libraries at Oxford and Cambridge, and the private collections of wealthy individuals in London, to purchase or copy rare books and manuscripts. Dr Ussher visited Mrs Drake on several occasions. In contrast to Mr Dod, Hart noted with a hint of jealousy that she seemed delighted to meet with this new worthy man of a similar age, and willingly listened to his advice and anecdotes with much reverence and respect, in whatever state of health she was in, *'being contented when he came to her to drop upon her many sweet distilling showers of precious speeches; leaving them to work after he were gone'*.

[30] Fruit and vegetables were not advised for a healthy diet as they contained mainly water which, as it was unsanitary, was thought to make people more vulnerable to disease, particularly dysentery.
[31] Later, Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, the most senior position in the Church of Ireland. He is best remembered for his book "The Annals of the World".

The Relationship with the Relater

'...the Relater, that sometime unworthy friend.'

Around this time, Mrs Drake relocated to the Parsonage[32] in Walton-on-Thames, which her husband also owned since, she explained, not only did Esher Place hold sad memories, but it was also miserably cold and damp in the winter (apparently, even Cardinal Wolsey had complained of its 'moist and corrupt air'). Its other appeal was that as a much smaller manor house only a few servants were needed and there was no space for resident divines; and Esher was nearby if she felt the inclination, in better weather, to ride her horses. This was a high point in Mrs Drake's case as she was in new surroundings and appeared less perturbed.

In the Jacobean society in which Mrs Drake lived, after providing children and managing the household, there were few other ways for a woman to express herself emotionally, or find outlets for her intellectual needs, apart from religious zeal. So it was natural that she was not opposed in principle to the use of divines to direct her spiritual journey. The very basis of her Puritan leanings, even if adopted or adapted to placate her husband, was directed not outwards to the world, but inwards to the individual and the direct relationship with God in everyday life, which with its quiet prayers and meditations in the home, created a more intimate environment than the cold church benches. The

[32] Francis Drake was Lord of the Manor of the Rectory of Walton-on-Thames and owned the Parsonage, which appeared on all early maps of Elmbridge, so must have been a significant building and estate. The site became known later as Walton Grove, but was demolished in 1973. This manor grew out of the Manor of Walton-on-Thames in the early 1600s (which was distinct from the Manor of Walton Leigh, whose timber-framed manor house still exists today). Whilst the wills of Francis Drake and his father Richard mention the manors of Walton and Walton Rectory, evidence from a document titled 'Title of Mr Pryce to the manor of Esher Episcopi 1583-1658' (SHC G3/1/36) shows that they only held a lease to Esher Place, and were not, at least legally, Lords of the Manor of Esher.

Godly, even if lost and suffering, woman and her relationship with a divine preacher, she had supposed, could be mutually beneficial. She would have companionship, access to knowledge with which she could educate herself, a ready source of responses to her religious enquiries and concerns, especially at times of loss or anxiety, and a constant gauge of her progress towards salvation — it would be almost as if God was walking beside her. For the divine's part, she assumed, there was the not insignificant matter of patronage, and if needs be, a place of residence. She had been disappointed then, to find that Mr Dod was elderly and infirm, and that when he looked at her, he only saw the Devil in disguise. But she had subsequently discovered that with one of her spiritual advisers at least — similar in age and attitude, if not social class — she had conversations on matters that she shared with no-one else, that her notions of self-worth had increased against all odds, and that she had developed more intense feelings than she had expected[33].

Throughout his text Dr Hart referred to himself in the third person as *'the Relater, that sometime unworthy friend'*, the person to whom the characters relate their story, and whose role it is to relate the salient learnings to the reader. He was by no means though, a passive actor. From the moment that he first learned of Mrs Drake's circumstances, he took the lead, identifying a divine to help her, persuading Mr Dod to meet her, writing to her husband, inviting himself into the household, and seeking out other divines. Despite this, he is hard to pin down. Whether he was a young man in awe of an older Mrs Drake,

[33] Diane Willen notes that with limited access to the public arena, women's zeal was all the more narrowly focused and all the more fervent, and quotes Patrick Collinson in *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* who drew attention to another feature of women's godliness: 'the spiritually intimate dealings - one is tempted to call them affairs - between women of the leisured classes and certain popular and pastorally gifted divines'. See: Diane Willen, Godly Women in Early Modern England; Puritanism and Gender, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 43, No. 4, October 1992, p. 568.

or of a similar age, or a middle-aged man who believed he was her mentor, makes a difference to how their relationship is viewed. The evidence is thin: he gave nothing away in his writings except that he was omnipresent in her life for almost a decade; he presented himself as a Doctor of Divinity — the most respected doctoral degree — and he was able to convince the various Puritan divines to attend Mrs Drake, but he was not one himself as he did not appear on lists of prominent Puritan preachers of the time. When he met Mrs Drake for the first time, in around 1616, the most that could be said is that he was learned, of a certain standing in Puritan circles, persuasive and in all likelihood close in age to Mrs Drake, between thirty and forty.

There are some noticeable omissions from his account. He rarely mentioned Mrs Drake's husband, Francis Drake, apart from noting her lack of emotional feelings for him, and to register his temper. Although she had three children when they met, and a fourth during the events recalled, how Mrs Drake interacted with them was of no interest. William, the oldest, for example, was nine at the beginning of the story and nineteen at its maternal conclusion. It is also striking that there are no passing references to Mrs Drake's daily responsibilities, even on the rare occasions of respite from her struggles, that may have contributed further to her burdens. In the frequent absences of her husband on business, who, if not her, was managing or at least directing the provision of food from the kitchen gardens and livestock, and maintaining the accounts, and paying the staff wages — and intervening in their squabbles or misfortunes — and ensuring the comfortable accommodation of the many visitors? Were her shortcomings in these most fundamental functions expected of a wife, another reason for Francis Drake's frustrations towards her?

Dr Hart's own personal circumstances do not merit a mention either. Was he a single man, or married, and was there a family at Whitefriars? Where had he studied to receive his doctorate? What arrangement for his services had been agreed with Francis Drake that allowed him to spend so many years at Mrs Drake's side, or did he have independent means? When not in London, was he living in one of the many rooms in Esher Place or renting rooms nearby? And, most pertinently, what exactly was his role, when it was Mr Dod (and the many other divines) who would have taken on the accepted duties of a chaplain, directing Mrs Drake's spiritual journey and Biblical studies, reading to her from the increasing canon of Puritanical books, sermons and pamphlets, and discussing their implications, all within the overarching remit of achieving her cure?

The nature of their relationship is veiled, but there were two episodes from this period that are intriguing. Mrs Drake and Dr Hart had clearly been discussing whether she should leave the household, and might find solace elsewhere, perhaps under the roof of another divine, where she would be free of the attention of her relatives, and the (seemingly meagre) responsibilities of her children, so that she could concentrate fully on her physical and spiritual recovery. For this purpose, they agreed that John Hart should go, secretly[34], to Essex to enquire whether Mr Rogers of Dedham — known as 'Roaring John Rogers' on account of the *'many wild notes'* of his lecturing[35] — would entertain her at his house.

[34] The phrase Dr Hart writes is: 'for this cause secretly made the Relater go into Essex…'
[35] John Rogers' sermons were legendary, and he was akin to a rock star in his own time, with people travelling many miles to hear him speak. His approach to 'breaking through the stony heart' of a doubter was to terrify people by 'roaring hideously, to represent the torments of the damned'. See: David D Hall, The Puritans – A Transatlantic History (New Jersey, 2019) p. 129. Thomas Goodwin, who later became Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, recalled one occasion when he was so overcome with emotion that on leaving

With an answer in the affirmative, Mrs Drake brought up the issue with her husband and parents, who flatly denied her request. Mr Dod (who was back again) and a Mr Culverwell offered themselves as chaperones, if that might sway the decision. That the original intention might have been for Dr Hart to accompany her, since it was he making the furtive arrangements, hung in the air between them. The refusal of her freedom *'much unhooked her spirit… so much did it afflict her'*.

There is then a confession, that Hart acknowledged he could have omitted, but has included because it is an example of the Devil's subtleties, and the *'furthest example of Satan's malice'*. One day, as he and Mrs Drake (and an unidentified 'friend' who he may have added for propriety since they took no part in what comes next) were walking in the garden in Walton-on-Thames, she suddenly stopped and fixed her gaze on the ground for several minutes, staring

Rogers' church, he "was fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the neck of my horse weeping before I had the power to mount". See Robert Halley D.D, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D.*, Vol II (London, 1861), p. 11.

with a wild look in her eyes. When at last he managed to gently shake her out of her trance, she uttered a question: *'If God, who with a word made Heaven and Earth, can soften my heart, then why does he not do it?'* Taking this as blasphemy, *'for such speeches were not to be born with, countenanced, or disputed with, but to be cast off, with detestation and abomination'*, Dr Hart left by the garden gate immediately, without saying a word to her. A little while later, after he had recovered his composure, she asked him whether he would join her for a horse ride at Esher, to which he replied angrily that he would certainly not be comfortable in the company of someone who had so recently blasphemed, for fear that the ground might open beneath them and swallow them up; and furthermore that the punishment for blasphemy was death by burning and that he was going to complain of her to the Archbishop, and buy bundles of sticks for her bonfire. At this *'we both parted in seeming discontent'*.

Anyone observing from a distance — the garden stroll, the pausing and his hands on her shoulders, the storming off, the arguing and gesturing — might

have imagined that this was a lovers' quarrel. It is clear from the historical record that these events — Dr Ussher's visits; Dr Hart's secret journey; the falling out — took place around 1619, when Joan Drake was pregnant and gave birth to her fourth child, John; but this fact is not mentioned anywhere in John Hart's written portrayal.

The Museum of Melancholy

'And now also about this time, came to visit her another worthy minister, whom the Relater brought to see her and judge of her Case.'

Dr Hart returned to his lodgings in Whitefriars for a month, but did write some kind words by letter in his absence. When he came back, Mrs Drake *'prayed him to stay no more so long away'*, thanked him for his harsh treatment of her, saying that she had deserved worse, and that if he ever saw her staring at the ground in such a way again, he was to intervene more quickly.

Having forgiven Mrs Drake her profanity, Dr Hart arranged for John Forbes to visit: *'...another worthy Minister, whom the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'.* Forbes, the pastor for the Merchant Adventurers in Middelburg in the Low Countries, concluded that *'it was the strangest that ever he had seen, heard or read of... and no more he would come to visit her, nor could be drawn unto it'.* It must have seemed to Francis Drake that his wife was fast becoming an exhibit of international repute in a museum of melancholy.

He might therefore have welcomed the familiar face of Mr Dod, who returned with yet another new approach which he had discussed with God in absentia. This time, he had three objectives which, in stages, would lead to her recovery: firstly, that she should be persuaded to go to church; then that she should take the sacrament; and thirdly that she should sing the Psalms. On her first visit to St. Mary's Church in Walton-on-Thames, Mrs Drake was taken to hear the rector, Dr Gibson, who had been warned in advance of her coming so that his sermon was uplifting to doubters and prudently avoided any contradictory messages. This did not go unnoticed, and she complained that *'he had been prompted, and had spoken things of purpose for her case, which she murmured at'*. There was, therefore, on subsequent occasions a tension between giving notice, which was still done, but putting across the message in the sermon in less obvious terms.

She was quite averse to taking the sacrament, so Mr Dod moved on to encouraging her to join in the singing of the Psalms. This she professed she was quite willing to do, but only the ones of *'complaint, petition, mourning and deprecation'* and not of *'thanksgiving, and congratulation'*. For if she was like an Ox ready for slaughter, what cause had she to give thanks; and if she was not going to Heaven, why should she sing Heaven's praises?

With some progress finally under his belt, John Dod brought up an issue that had been bothering him for some time: whether she still wanted to kill herself? He approached the topic one day, in a somewhat graphic manner. Imagine, he said to her, that you are condemned to be burned at the stake, or hung drawn and quartered, or put on the rack then scourged and whipped and tortured. If at the last moment she was reprieved and given the chance to live for a further ten or twenty years, would she now consider it favourably? To

which she replied, yes, of course. Then why, he asked, *'did you all this while seem so eager to have departed from this life, not knowing whether you would be in Hell's fires forever, or not, rather than let nature take its course, and trying to understand God's will?'* Returning his gaze, she assured him that he should have no more jealousy or suspicion, since she was resolved to live so long as God would permit her.

Such was the notoriety of Mrs Drake's case, and the ongoing but as yet futile efforts to cure her, that Dr Hart began receiving letters offering advice, including a long missive from Robert Bruce, a Scottish minister who had fallen foul of King James, been exiled and was currently in prison *'amongst the wild Irish'*. Hart skipped over Bruce's advice *('too long here to insert'*) but was highly impressed by a speech that he had written for Mrs Drake to read out to the Devil, that was *'worthy to be written in letters of gold'*, and which he copied out in full.

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By 1620, having come to the end of his years of intermittent service, Mr Dod announced his retirement from the *'hot skirmishes with Satan'*, and for his efforts was given a large reward by the Tothills. Mrs Drake was not dismayed to see him go, and insisted that the next incumbent should live close by so that he could be in constant attendance when she needed an able preacher to answer her burning questions. Dr Hart might have thought that he had served his apprenticeship and earned this role by now, but instead it went to Thomas Hooker who was made rector of St George's Church in Esher by Francis

Drake[36], agreeing to a *'poor living of forty pounds per annum'*, somewhat alleviated by being given food and lodgings at Esher Place; Mrs Drake being primarily in Walton-on-Thames. The new regime began well, and Hart noted with a touch of envy, how being a recent graduate of Cambridge, Hooker came with a *'new answering method, wherewith she was marvellously delighted, being very covetous of knowledge'*.

Hooker was patient and observant, adapting his methods to suit changes in her disposition brought upon by her physical ailments — her restless thoughts, mood swings, heartburn and constant headaches. His interest seemed to stem from having undergone some similar trauma in his own life, and he admitted that he *'long had a soul harassed with such distresses'*. He gave counsel in such a stirring fashion, that it was clear to all who met him that he was *'born to be considerable'*, which turned out to be the case as he stayed only long enough to woo and marry Mrs Drake's waiting-woman, Susannah Garbrand, at Shardeloes and he left for the position of Lecturer at a church in Chelmsford after a couple of years[37]. From a constant foil to her weaknesses, available day or night, Mrs Drake was reduced to visits once a week on Thursdays to the local minister, Mr Wetherell[38] of Walton-on-Thames.

[36] The Cure at Esher was a Donative (i.e. locally endowed position), and not a Presentative endowment (i.e. where the candidate had to be personally approved by the Bishop), so that Thomas Hooker, a nonconformist, did not have to present himself and swear an oath, and Francis Drake had influence over his selection.

[37] The will of Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher in December 1622 leaves a bequest to the Curate, Thomas Hooker.

[38] A board in St Mary's church in Walton-on-Thames records that Brian Wetherell was vicar between 1618 and 1623.

Rapture and Regret

'You must forgive me that you for so many years together having shown me so much love…that yet I have been so unkind unto you.'

For the last section of his book, Dr Hart moved the action forward four years, like the denouement scene in a play. In doing so he skipped over, unmentioned, the death of John Drake at the age of three, in 1623, and provided no indication of how this might have affected Mrs Drake, although given her fragility and lack of spiritual support, it can be imagined. All that we are told is that *'about this time, a strong distaste was given her from a near friend…not necessary here to relate, nor to our purpose'.* Hart does not tell us who is at fault, but it is clear that whilst he still keeps a watchful eye on her, it is from a distance.

Mrs Drake was bedridden, convinced she was dying. She told her husband that she wanted her final days to be spent at her parent's house, Shardeloes near Amersham, and was determined to leave as soon as possible, and when he demurred with the excuse that he had business to finish, she took two servants and left. Soon, Hart heard reports that Mrs Drake was having some sort of feverish episode in which she was *'in a surpassing extraordinary strange humor of talking of the best things perpetually night and day without intermission, not having any jot of sleep…whereby her spirits were both much spent and tired out'*. He took it upon himself to fetch Mr Dod, and together they went to Shardeloes, where she explained that she had so much she wanted to say, and so little time left in which to say it.

The final days, that took place over Easter 1625, read like diary entries; a countdown to death.

Sunday 10th April 1625 — The Second Sunday Before Her Death

She forbade her remaining children (who were aged about nineteen, fifteen and ten) to go to church, as she wanted to prepare them and could not be certain that she would last another week. She expounded scripture to them from memory, and gave them her blessing.

Monday 11th April 1625

She spent the day in conference with Mr Dod, but it was not like the old times because it was she in perpetual motion — speaking ill of this life and wondering aloud about heaven and eternal glory and the life to come — and he was the listener. She was not sleeping and barely eating.

Tuesday 12th April 1625

At eight o'clock in the morning, the residents of the Tothill's mansion were *'strangely interrupted'* by otherworldly shrieks from Mrs Drake's bedroom, where she sat bolt upright in bed, staring upwards at the ceiling, her chest heaving, repeating the same phrases, over and over, at a great speed:

'What's this, what's this! I am undone, I am undone! I can't endure it any longer! Look, the Angels have come for me! They are waiting! Bring me my white robes! Quickly, quickly! Let me be gone, let me be gone! It overcomes me, it overcomes me! What shall I do, what shall I do?'

Whatever was the vision she was seeing, it was one of extreme ecstasy, and the onlookers remained at some distance, tied to the spot in wonder. Dr Hart thought she would fly away, leaving a hole in the roof. Only her husband had lost control, weeping and wringing his hands and pacing up and down.

The passing of time was lost for a while, but when she did eventually return to her senses, she was able to describe what had happened. She had been

praying, pleading with God that he would not absent himself forever, and that just once before her death he would reveal Christ to her and give her some brief sensation of his love, when she had a sudden feeling of unsupportable joy rushing in at her that she could not help but cry out.

Next, in the retelling of a moment that gives the impression that it had been worked on, and honed, and repeated, and revised, Dr Hart indicated to the reader where he had obtained the permission to write his book, that she said:

'After I am gone, never despair of anyone, how desperately miserable so ever their Case might be, which at its worst could never exceed mine, but use and apply the same means unto them that you have used with me, and they will prevail at length.'[39]

That afternoon, as the room filled with more relatives and friends who had come to share her happiness — this being an unusual experience — she had another vision; and later on, with a few remaining to watch over her, she spent the night singing Psalms. Dr Hart was most pleased that she even asked for Psalm 30, that he had *'always urged upon her, to belong unto her'* but *'dared never appropriate or apply the same unto myself, until now'*. It was their own Psalm[40] and they sang it together: *'...and so that Tuesday night [we] sung the same very cheerfully'*. She had not slept for a week.

[39] Schmidt call this an example of the 'Puritan conversion narrative' to be copied and cultivated. See: Schmidt, Melancholy and the Care of the Soul. p. 74.
[40] Psalm 30 is one of Thanksgiving, reflecting back on God's goodness in being delivered from trouble, blessed in life, showered with mercy, and the turning of mourning into dancing. It includes the line: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (30:5).

Wednesday 13th April 1625

When Mrs Tothill came to see her daughter on Wednesday morning, she found her already up and saw that she had dressed herself entirely in white *'like a bride'* from head to toe. Turning to her mother, she told her: *'I caused myself to be dressed thus this morning, that you might see how I would be laid in the grave.'* Hearing this, Mrs Tothill burst into tears, and had to leave the room to steady herself.

Mrs Drake spent the morning and afternoon taking her leave of members of the household, giving each a moment of her time where she passed on advice suitable to their station. In the evening, she called for her father and when he came downstairs again, Dr Hart, clearly brazen enough to accost a grieving man leaving his dying daughter's room, *'did what I could in a fair way to have fished from him, what she had said unto him',* but obtained nothing but generalities, Mr Tothill preferring to keep his own counsel.

Next, it was Dr Hart's turn to be summoned, and she asked him to sit beside her. She was solemn at first, thanking him for his care and the pains he had taken with her then, taking his hand, she asked if he would do her a favour. The favour, which he found strange and needless, was that he should forgive her. He protested that instead it was she that should forgive him, as he had failed both in his duty and love for her. Her words are given, but they are also his words because it is through him that they appear on the page:

She said: *"You must forgive me that you for so many years together having shown me so much love, and been a means of my everlasting comfort and happiness, that yet I have been so unkind unto you, for I have not loved you*

by the hundred part, in that measure I ought to have done, according to that love you have shown to me."

The reason for her reticence, she explained, was that until she was assured of God's love, she could not love him or anyone else. But now that the Holy Spirit had been rekindled within her, her only regret was that in so short a time left, she was *'so unfit and disabled to perform my desires'*.

Was this a declaration of love, of sorts, and a statement of regret on her deathbed that she had not been in a position to act upon it? Or a long-overdue explanation of her uncharitable treatment of him for all those years, despite being aware of his utter devotion?

Whatever it was she was trying to say, or how he understood it, the matter was resolved, and he was dismissed.

Thursday 14th and Good Friday 15th April 1625

Dr Hart's prose transformed into poetry, as he described the changes that occurred towards the end of the week.

'For, lo, the scene now changes again, the curtain waves and tosses a little with an uncouth[41] *wind… she who lately was in a glorious triumph, flying away forcibly from us all, as it were with Eagles wings mounting upwards, is now suddenly surprised with an extreme fainting and weakness of spirits…not being as formerly so lively and substantial.'*

A letter was sent to London, begging for two physicians to be sent urgently, in the hope that she might be given some potions to make her sleep, it now being ten days of wakefulness.

Easter Saturday 16th and Easter Sunday 17th April 1625

Mr Dod was seen entering Shardeloes on Saturday, where he was going to keep a private fast for Mrs Drake, accompanied by someone with a familiar profile — Thomas Hooker. It was a partial reunion of the divines who had attended her during the previous years. Soon afterwards, they were joined by a new face, a minister called Dr Preston, who had been present at the deathbed of King James I just three weeks before, in his capacity as Chaplain to the Prince, now King Charles I.

In the afternoon, Mrs Drake asked for the three of them to pray with her, after which she told them that her time was now at hand. Her parents, husband and children were called for, and she blessed them and took leave of them, then began quietly singing hymns and verses of Psalms, until by Easter Sunday her hollow, low voice could scarcely be understood.

[41] Archaic meaning: Mysterious; unfamiliar.

Easter Monday 18th April 1625

On Sunday night she finally fell asleep, and when she awoke on Easter Monday morning, she found herself surrounded by family, friends, and the divines, and rejoiced and smiled, taking their hands in turn as they were offered. Before midday, she beckoned to Mr Dod to join her, and lifted up her hands in prayer, then as he was about to begin, her arms suddenly collapsed and she departed.

Two days later she was buried all in white as she had requested, with Dr Preston, the king's chaplain, preaching her funeral sermon. Amongst the praises that Dr Hart wrote down, and possibly spoke out loud, were:

On her melancholy (a great understatement): *'She was a good creature, in her natural state, qualified with the best of mere nature's endowments, accidentally encountering with some grand difficulties, which a little overcame her natural parts.*'

On her legacy: *'The vision is for an appointed time, though it tarry, yet wait, for it will come, as it did unto this good woman after ten years expectation… and in the end did manifoldly surmount all her sufferings and troubles…leaving herself as the matchless monument of God's unspeakable mercy, unto all stout, stiff, and hard-hearted sinners for ever.'*

On her character: *'She always wore her worst side outmost, and wonderfully cloaked all the good things she ever did or said'.*

What he meant by this last observation only becomes clear on further consideration, that the divines saw her at her worst, as a difficult woman possessed, who argued with them at every turn; but this was not her true

character, as in secret, behind their backs, she had a glorious, if melancholic, temperament which her waiting-woman, and of course Dr Hart, were well aware of, but she forbade them to disclose: *'it was treason for any she entrusted to betray any part or parcel of her goodness'.*

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Carved in marble on her memorial[42] her husband chose to reveal that, in another challenge to convention, she had nursed her youngest son John herself, and that they were entombed together.

[42] Mrs Drake's memorial is in the Drake Chapel in St. Mary's Church, Amersham.

PART 2: Afterlife

Biography, Memoir, Eulogy and Love Letter

'Seeing by God's mercy I was made an unworthy instrument of her recovery, and an eye-witnessing actor in all her Tragic-Comedy…I was enforced and dare not but thus vent the business of her rare Case, unto succeeding posterity.'

Her deathbed confession to Dr Hart suggests that Mrs Drake had developed intense feelings for him. Even if he was inwardly elated (despite the circumstances), upon reflection he may have come to the view that an emotional relationship was the natural outcome of their time spent in close proximity, discussing matters of great personal import, which broke down the otherwise strict gender barriers[43]. He was also aware that John Dod was fond of evoking the image of Christ as a ravishing bridegroom, with Mrs Drake as his bride to be, and that in the absence of affection for her husband and her unwillingness to accept his authority, that seductive vision might be transferred onto himself[44]. The guilt from this may have added to her anxiety. Dr Hart may have remembered that the Puritan minister John Burges[45], in whose company he had first learned of Mrs Drake's story and who had been himself rejected by her, was chaplain for several years to Lady Mary Vere (1581-1671). Afterwards

[43] Diane Willen provides evidence of 'emotionally or intellectually satisfying relationships' between respectable women of the period trying to cope with life's vagaries, and their chaplains. See Diane Willen, Godly Women in Early Modern England, p. 574.

[44] Amanda Porterfield suggests in 'Women's Attraction to Puritanism' that women's ability to exercise influence over their spiritual advisers could lead to emotional vulnerability and erotically charged relationships. See Amanda Porterfield, Women's Attraction to Puritanism. *Church History*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1991, p. 198. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/3167525.

[45] Dr Hart had first heard of Mrs Drake's case whilst dining in in Isleworth in the company of John Burges(s) (1563–1635), a noted Puritan and physician who had been imprisoned in 1604 for making a controversial speech before King James I, and upon release fled abroad to Holland where he met Sir Horace Vere, an army officer. Back in England he became chaplain to Lady Vere and in 1617 wrote enquiring about her recent melancholy (BL, Add. MS 4275, fos 60r, 62r.).

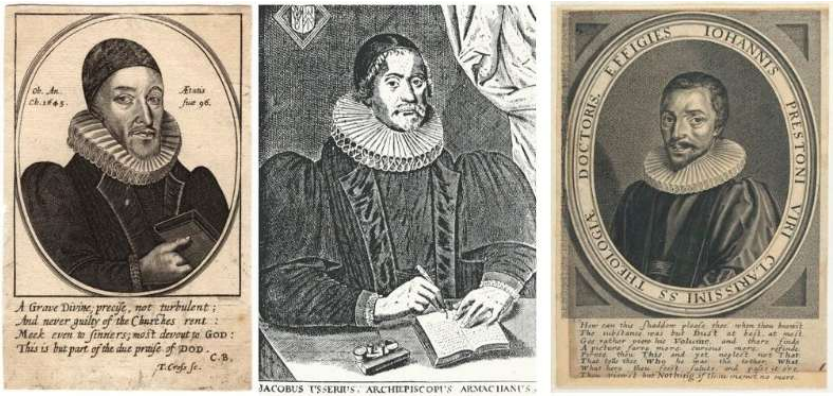
Burges wrote to her having learned of an episode of melancholy, and expressing his own grief at the death of his wife. Lady Vere's other correspondents, of which there were many, included John Dod and Dr Preston. A more intimate example[46] is Ezekiel Rogers, chaplain to Lady Joan Barrington (c.1558 – 1641) who wrote to her: 'You were the first with whom I had any so serious and solemn converse about matters tending to the work of grace... I have therefore good cause to have you in my choicest remembrance… I must not, I cannot forget those times, when the Lord working powerfully on your soul, made you (in seeking my poor help) an occasion of much quickening and benefit to me.' Lady Barrington also had mental struggles, as he continued: 'I hope that your old disease of melancholy is banished away by faith, as it is high time.'

Perhaps, in light of this, Dr John Hart began his book as a spiritual guidebook but in reminiscing it became something else: a biography, a memoir, and a eulogy that read in places like a recollection of a lost love. His stated aim was to help others suffering from spiritual anxiety, but he chose to include so many personal details about Mrs Drake, which she had recounted to him on their walks or horse rides together, or which he had observed as an eyewitness: her childhood memories; her character and appearance; feelings about her marriage; episodes of domestic violence; her physical ailments; her suicidal thoughts; expressions of affection; the fine detail of the final days. Whether he realised it or not as he was writing, we can sense his emotions, such as his jealousy of the more charismatic and learned divines, or his excitement at the secret mission, or his passion during the argument in the garden, and his utter anguish at her

[46] Willen, Godly Women in Early Modern England, p. 572.

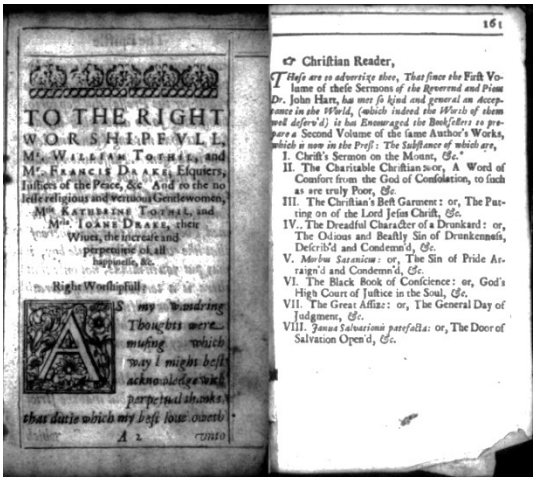
death. Was he, in his pious outpourings, oblivious to the intimacy of his revelations? Or else, was this the reason he procrastinated?

His book was first published in 1647, in a brief moment of respite during the Civil War, as “Trodden Down Strength by the God of Strength, or Mrs Drake Revived” but under a slight pseudonym ‘Hart On-Hi’. A later reprint used his full name — John Hart D.D. — but with a new, and much longer, title: “The Firebrand taken out of the Fire, or The Wonderful History, Case and Cure of Mistress Drake, sometime the wife of Francis Drake of Esher in the County of Surrey, Esq., who was under the power and severe discipline of Satan for the space of ten years, and was redeemed from his tyranny in a wonderful manner a little before her death, by the great mercy of God, and (instrumentally) by the extraordinary pains, prayers and fastings of four reverend divines, whose names are here subscribed, viz. Dod; Ussher; Hooker; Preston.”



Dr Hart called his work a ‘Tragic-Comedy’. In the meaning of the period, this was not a mixture of tragedy and comedy (for there was little light relief in Mrs Drake’s story) but a play which had a serious theme throughout, yet a happy ending. This was not, however, his first publication as his earliest

literary output appears to be “The Burning Bush Not Consumed” which was published in 1616 with a dedication to his new patrons: ‘To the Right Worshipful Mr William Tothill and Mr Francis Drake, Esquires… and to the no less religious and virtuous Gentlewomen, Mrs Katherine Tothill and Mrs Joan Drake, their wives, the increase and perpetuity of all happiness etc.’ which he signed ‘Yours in duty, much and ever bound, J Hart’.



TO THE RIGHT
WORSHIPFVLL
Mr. WILLIAM TOTHILL, and
Mr. FRANCIS DRAKE, Esquiers,
Iustices of the Peace, &c. And to the no
lesse religious and vertuous Gentlewomen,
Mrs KATHARINE TOTHILL, and
Mrs IOANE DRAKE, their
Wiues, the increase and
perpetuity of all
happinesse, &c.

Right Worshipfull

S my wandring
Thoughts were
musing which
way I might best
acknowledge with
perpetual thanks
that dutie which my best loue oweth

A 2 vnto

161

☞ Christian Reader,

THese are to advertize thee, That since the Fifth Volume of these Sermons *of the Reverend and Pious* Dr. John Hart, *has met so kind and general an acceptance in the World, (which indeed the Worth of them well deserv'd) it has Encouraged the Booksellers to prepare a* Second Volume of the same Author's Works, *which is now in the Presse: The Substance of which are,*

I. Christ's Sermon on the Mount, &c.
II. The Charitable Christian Scor, A Word of Comfort from the God of Consolation, to such as are truly Poor, &c.
III. The Christian's Best Garment: or, The Putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ, &c.
IV. The Dreadful Character of a Drunkard: or, The Odious and Beastly Sin of Drunkenness, Describ'd and Condemn'd, &c.
V. *Morbus Satanicus*: or, The Sin of Pride Arraign'd and Condemn'd, &c.
VI. The Black Book of Conscience: or, God's High Court of Justice in the Soul, &c.
VII. The Great Assize: or, The General Day of Judgment, &c.
VIII. *Fanua Salvationis patefacta*: or, The Door of Salvation Open'd, &c.

Dr John Hart’s first publication in 1616, dedicated to the Tothills and Drakes.

§

In that same summer of 1616, Dr James Ussher received a letter at Trinity College, Dublin, addressing him as ‘Reverend and my loving friend’ and chiding him gently for not having replied to the correspondent’s previous letters. This time, though, there was a specific request *“which is so great, that I think I shall never much joy in anything here until I have some hope from you to have it granted”*, which was to know exactly when Ussher was next planning to come to England; and there was a promise to meet him with a horse at the ready at

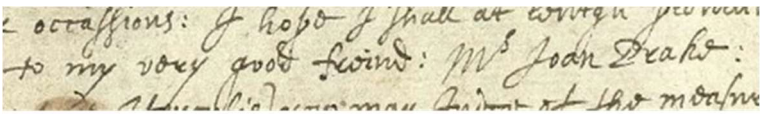
Westchester[47], where they had last parted a few years ago, so that they could ride south together. The reason for this urgency, the letter continued, was that *"there is a dear friend of mine, whom now it hath pleased God to make Mr. Dod a means to bring from Satan's most horrible delusions a little… who hath so great a desire to hear you upon my report"*. As well as Mr Dod, John Rogers of Dedham was mentioned as someone whose powerful preaching could be of assistance, but *"for divers reasons, it is impossible for ought I know"*, and the godly minister Mr Culverwell was also referred to. There was news from mutual friends: Dr Burges had been given permission to preach again; and Mrs Scudamore was to be married to a gentleman called Leigh from Staffordshire. For those familiar with Mrs Drake's story, it is immediately apparent that the letter writer and the 'Relater' are one and the same person.

John Hart countered Ussher's possible excuses by reminding him that he must surely be due a break after his years of toil in his study, and assuring him that his friends would cover his costs. Another reason to travel would be so that he could personally amend copies of his sermons, which were in high demand for publication, before they went to print, thereby avoiding the problems that had dogged Mr Dod upon detecting errors in his book on the Ten Commandments, which had *"caused him great grief and much trouble to mend"*.

The letter was dated 22nd June 1616, and sent from London, but Ussher did not reply, so Dr Hart tried again some nine months later, on the 12th March 1617, enclosing four small religious books. He pointed out that it had now been three years since Ussher was last in England, but perhaps having become a

[47] Name for Chester used in the early modern period, and from where ships sailed to and from Dublin.

married man had changed his habits? There was an update, and now a name, on his *"very good friend Mrs. Joan Drake…for the present, though a little better, yet she continues in her mind troubled and tossed"* and his dedication to her cause was underlined: *"Of all my cares, it is one of the principal to procure her peace; therefore it maketh me send everywhere for help unto her, as also unto you, to know if there be any hope shortly to see you."*



Ussher finally replied, but it was a whole year later in March 1618, and worse Dr Hart did not receive the letter until the beginning of July. His response began, tongue-in-cheek, with a rebuke: *"Wherein I perceived you deal with me as for the most part God doth with his children, to send them unexpected favours, not when they desire, but when he sees a fit time, after they have often begged and entreated, waited long, but chiefly when they have in a manner past hope of obtaining."* This was a relationship of friends and contemporaries: *"Yet must you not imagine that ever I conceived any displeasure against you; only a story of the Old Testament hath taught me now and then to set my friend's corn on fire, to have some of their acquaintance, which I put in practice to you, only so far as that you might do as you would be done unto, seeing you are so well able; wherefore I must assure you there needs no forgiveness where there was neither fault committed nor offence taken, save so far as might, like a whetstone, sharpen you to write."* His only complaint was that Ussher's letter was not longer.

Presumably, Ussher had confirmed his long-awaited visit to England that would start in 1619, as there was no specific mention of Mrs Drake's

progress, although it was noted that Mr Dod had been *"sick even unto death"* but had recovered. With knowledge that Ussher was reading his correspondence, this was a much longer reply and provided more evidence of Dr Hart's character and background. There was confirmation of his Puritan and anti-Papist religious views with criticism of the poor standards of preaching in the English parishes, rumours of Catholic atrocities abroad narrowly averted, and a summary of the outcome from a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. There was further evidence of Dr Hart's ties to Scotland[48], with his calling John Forbes, the minister originally from Edinburgh but resident in Middleburg, *"our countryman"*. Mr Culverwell was recorded as managing some fallout from Ussher's written opinion on 'Universal Grace.'

The letter ended with a flourish: *"Therefore, still entreating your prayers, and much wishing your presence, much happiness may still attend you; that out of your belly may flow rivers of the water of life to water the Lord's garden; and long may you flourish as a palm tree and a cedar in the courts of our God, until filled with your reward he give you to drink out of the rivers of his pleasures. Yours ever much and ever bound, J. Heart."*

§

All three letters, the only ones extant between the two men, were preserved among hundreds of others by Ussher's chaplain[49] after his death and eventually found their way to the Bodleian library in Oxford, courtesy of an eighteenth-century antiquarian collector called Richard Rawlinson. At various

[48] Dr Hart also dedicated his book 'Fort Royal', published in 1649, to Christian Cavendish, Countess of Devonshire, with a remark that he considered her mother, Lady Kinloss of Fife, a 'sometime noble friend'.
[49] Dr Richard Parr was James Ussher's chaplain and biographer and published a collection of his letters in 1686.

times, they were transcribed and published in collections of Ussher's works, but as the foreword to one declared: 'The Editor has felt considerable doubts as to the course he ought to pursue with regard to the orthography of the names: the variety of spelling is very extraordinary, even in the signatures. He has, however, determined to leave them as given by Dr. Parr, for it is probable that he, being in possession of the autograph letter, adopted the spelling he found in them.' Transcription error does certainly have an impact — in Hart's letters, for example, Mrs Drake was transcribed as 'Mrs John Drake', Lady Scudamore was variously 'Skidmore' and 'Shedmore', and John Rogers was from 'Dodam'. This may explain why the original letters have been classified as being written by a 'J Heartwell' in the library catalogue.

John Hart's book, and the memoir of Mrs Joan Drake that it contains, is little known today and is mainly cited briefly in academic circles as a case study of religious melancholy[50]. The only publication that has attempted a broader analysis is a two-part article 'Called by thy name, leave us not: The case of Mrs. Joan Drake'[51] by George Huntston Williams (1914-2000) from 1968. Williams was a noted theology professor who held the Hollis Chair of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School between 1963 and 1980[52]. As a consequence, Williams was less interested in Mrs Drake's life story than in how her case influenced the pastoral career of Thomas Hooker, who became a prominent figure amongst New England Puritans. Whilst the first section provides a useful

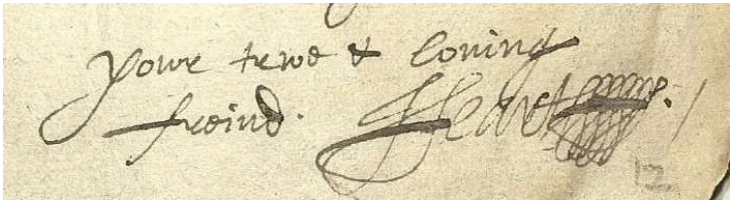
[50] For the best examples see: Section titled 'Woman's Melancholy' in Hunter, Melancholy and the doctrine of reprobation; and section titled 'The Devil's Bath' in Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul; Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (London, 2007).
[51] George Huntston Williams, 1968. Called by thy name, leave us not: The case of Mrs. Joan Drake, a formative episode in the pastoral career of Thomas Hooker in England. Harvard Library Bulletin XVI (2), April 1968: pp. 111-128; Harvard Library Bulletin XVI (3), July 1968: pp. 278-300.
[52] Petersen, R. L. (2000). In Memoriam: George Huntston Williams, Harvard Divinity School Hollis Professor of Divinity, Emeritus, Dies at 86. The Sixteenth Century Journal, 31(4), 1081–1082. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2671190

overview of key passages for anyone who has not read the original, it is the second part — in which Williams dramatically unveils the 'identity' of the Relater — that has created a huge (relatively speaking) confusion. Williams took the classification of 'J Heartwell' at face value and began to search the Jacobean archives, alighting on Jasper Heartwell, a young law student[53] at Middle Temple, whose family were from Preston Deanery in Northamptonshire, conveniently close to John Dod's ministry at Canons Ashby. He then proceeded to provide the logical basis to support his proposition, by eliminating all other options as author, namely: Francis Drake, the husband; Mrs Drake's father or mother; Mr Dod, or one of the other attending ministers; a close relative; a woman, possibly a waiting-woman; or a physician. Continuing with what would now be identified as 'confirmation bias', Williams downplayed evidence to the contrary that included: calling the identification of John Hart as the author by George Thomason[54] — the respected, contemporaneous expert on pamphlets — a 'faulty seventeenth-century ascription'; naively assuming that a young law student could have somehow already established the volume of contacts across the close-knit Puritan network, and the religious authority to ask for support; ignoring that the letter of 1617 refers to a previous visit by Ussher (in 1613) when the writer accompanied him to Chester to see him off, and 'Jasper' would have been a schoolboy; and passing over without comment that the jaunty tone of the letters clearly reveals friendship between men of similar age, status and religious education. Then there is the existence, unmentioned by Williams, of that other

[53] Williams notes that Jasper Heartwell was not being admitted 'generally' (where the age would typically be 16) but 'specially', in which case he was probably a year or two older.
[54] George Thomason (d. 1666) was a bookseller and publisher based in St Paul's churchyard, who began collecting copies of all books, pamphlets, and newssheets printed from the outbreak of the Civil War in 1641. By 1661, his collection consisted of over 22,000 publications. It is now held in the British Library.

work by John Hart, the 'Burning Bush', published in 1616 with a dedication to the Drakes and Tothills.

However, all of these arguments are secondary since a mistake had been made by those classifying the letters, as the originals (which Williams understandably never saw as he was based on the other side of the Atlantic) clearly show that the signature is 'J Heart' plus a few decorative strokes of his pen, and definitely not 'J Heartwell'.



Dr Hart's letters reveal that, far from being arbitrary ministers that *'the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'*, the divines were for the most part members of a well-connected Puritan network ready and waiting to be called into action on just such an occasion, and in contact with those within the established church who shared some of the same values. Dr James Ussher, on his way to becoming head of the Church in Ireland, was such a 'friend', carefully managing his association with nonconformists through the infrequency and brevity of his written communications.

The content of the letters also confirms and expands the sketchy details about Dr John Hart from his book. He was sociable and charming, playful and teasing, literary and poetic, well-read in European religious affairs and a fount of news and court gossip, and possibly spoke with a slight Scottish lilt.

§

Given his urgency, the date of first publishing his account of Mrs Drake is puzzling. Why did he hesitate so long after her death — fully twenty-two years — and then publish initially under a pseudonym? Was it because he waited until all of those most closely involved had died and could not question his version of events: Francis Drake in 1634; Mr Dod in 1645; and Thomas Hooker in 1647, the very same year that John Hart's book first appeared in Mr Pilkington's bookshop?

Alternative Medicine

'…the indisposition and melancholy temper of her body was such…she therewith being averse unto Physick'

Whether it was the prime cause of her melancholy, or a contributory factor, Mrs Drake's spiritual angst had created an awkward predicament for those attempting a cure. The Puritans took the doctrine of Predestination from Calvin which stated that God had already decided who were the small group of people who were saved and would have eternal life (the 'elect') and that therefore everyone else was barred from access to salvation and sentenced to eternal hellfire (the 'reprobates')[55]. The major conundrum arising from Predestination was how could anyone know for certain if they were an elect? The Puritans' answer was that at some point in your life, you would receive a profound sense of God's 'saving grace' that was your assurance of being chosen, but that whilst some might experience this in their youth, and therefore live a life of great peace and security, others might have to wait until near death, by which time they would be distraught. For the latter, the only recourse was to conform to the Puritanical beliefs and practices in the expectation of a future sign from God, all the while trying to avoid the temptations offered by the Devil. This was also the reason given to those who pointed out that since being saved or rejected was decided before you were born, what was the point in living according to strict and unpalatable rules since it made no difference to your salvation? Understandably, such a situation was going to cause anxiety for many

[55] Predestination developed in reaction to the Catholic position that a sinner could gain salvation by penance or paying for an indulgence. The argument was that only a small percentage of people would be saved, sometimes said to be as few as one in a thousand. See: Hall, The Puritans, p. 129.

adherents, but especially those of a melancholic disposition who were most likely to be thrown into a deep, even suicidal, despair that would provoke physical symptoms which were unresponsive to the rudimentary medicine available.

The irony was that Mrs Drake did not appear to be particularly religious before her marriage, but the more divines she was presented with, or sought out, the more she learned of Puritan theology and the relevant biblical passages, and the more she learned how to exploit their weaknesses. Hart observed that she became adept at backing up her arguments with various passages from the Bible that she had come across whilst apparently randomly *'tumbling and tossing'* over the scriptures — an act that like a game of chance would have been perceived as heresy by the divines — and finding chapters and verses wherever her finger happened to alight, that supported her position. The challenge, therefore, for the divines involved in Mrs Drake's case — Mr Dod in particular — was how to proceed in the face of such a fiercely held and argued belief in her own damnation, and from an obviously intelligent and charismatic woman who might serve as an example to others? Their aim was to turn her doubt into a positive sign by attributing her anxiety and counterarguments to the Devil's wiles[56], that 'suffering was an experience of the elect, a sign of love, not of reprobation'[57], and to prepare her in the best possible way for her salvation. This mainly took the form of a rudimentary 'talking cure', but one that involved unrelenting scrutiny and religious pressure to conform. Once possession by the Devil was assumed, all of Mrs Drake's words and deeds were interpreted by those closest to her on that basis, and her own being was lost. Her parents,

[56] Hall, The History of the Puritans, p. 131.
[57] Hunter, Melancholy and the doctrine of reprobation, p. 183.

husband, children, servants, neighbours and friends, and the divines, all looked past her. This must have been hard for her to take in, and it is no wonder that her hold on sanity began to dissolve. The strategies she had available to fight for the survival of her selfhood were limited. With no other recourse, she had to rely on her own ingenuity to face her challenges, which she achieved via persistent subversions of authority that were still within her control. She defied Mr Dod with dramatic distractions, found rebuttals to his pronouncements, and sent out her maid to seek alternative arguments she could use. She refused to take the sacrament or sing uplifting psalms. She formulated a determined, if impracticable, plan to escape. In desperation, she cut herself and swallowed pins. Against convention, she nursed her precious youngest son. In her final act, she symbolically left her husband, and specified how she wanted to be buried.

In the end, when living became untenable, psychosis was a natural response to her disconnection from reality. The divines had waited, as months stretched out to years then to a decade, and it was always a fine line with Mrs Drake's despair at being abandoned by God threatening on many occasions to cross over into blasphemy, so it was no wonder that they hailed her visions of Christ as a sign from God. They maintained that Mrs Drake's brief moment of joy and rapture made up for her miserable experience of life on this earth, *'if a touch, a taste, a short glance only be so forcible and ravishing, how surmountingly excellent and glorious shall that estate be to drink at the fountainhead of the beatific vision, out of the rivers of His pleasures forever?'* The joy spread by word of mouth, and letters, to become the cornerstone of Hooker's theology and the 'perpetual monument' of Hart's account.

§

When John Hart's book was published in 1647, the only other living person close enough to have retained vivid recollections of Mrs Joan Drake and her sufferings, was her eldest son. However, the now Sir William Drake, 1st Baronet of Shardeloes, aged forty-one, was reputedly in Italy (as he later claimed to be able to read Machiavelli in his original language) having left the country during the early uncertainties of the Civil War. He told those who queried his decision that it was for health reasons, and indeed he had never possessed the deportment of a soldier.

In 1943, three hundred years later and in the middle of another war, an antiquarian bookseller came across a large bundle of papers in the library at Shardeloes, containing several notebooks and diaries dating from the seventeenth century. At first, these were thought to have been written by William Tothill, Mrs Drake's father, but in the mid-1970s they were definitively attributed to her son, William.

How does a mother's long-term disorder affect her children? How did the absence of Mrs Drake's love, or more precisely how did her disinterest, leave its mark? William Drake emerged from a blighted childhood as a serious and bookish young man. His education seems to have taken place partly in Amersham, presumably residing at least in term-time with his grandparents at Shardeloes, since his tutor was Charles Croke, rector of Agmondisham[58], who had gained a Doctorate of Divinity from Christ Church, Oxford. It was probably this link that enabled William to be accepted at the same college, where he became a junior student studying for a BA in 1623. Following university, he studied to be a lawyer at the Middle Temple, and read up on legal histories,

[58] Agmondisham is an old name for Amersham.

among them “The Process and Proceedings of the Court of Chancery” by his own grandfather, William Tothill.

In his notebooks, known as ‘commonplace books’, he kept lists of every book he read (hundreds of titles from classical philosophers and historians to humanist thinkers) and made notes on everything he found of interest, or learned from conversations and debates, as well as extracts from letters he received, quotes he wanted to remember, fables and proverbs, medical remedies and details of his estate dealings. These would form the basis of his approach to life: the acquisition of useful knowledge, self-improvement, and the practical application of both via rules of behaviour that he devised for himself to enhance his fortunes. In dealing with men, for example — who overall he considered deceitful, vain liars — he aimed to treat social situations like a game in which he arrived fully prepared with background information, but said little, giving nothing away, yet noting what views others had that could be exploited later for monetary gain. He evaluated everyone only for their potential value to him in financial terms or for their contacts. Any new acquaintance must have thought him an introverted snob.

He approached marriage, and women generally, in a similarly unemotional way, as a means to an end of acquiring more property and providing children, which he thought were ‘certain cares, but uncertain comforts’ and hugely expensive. He was particularly suspicious of intelligent women who he felt overawed or tricked their husbands, and warned himself of the dangers implicit in decisions made in the heat of passion. As for religion, he believed that it was the only way that a woman’s natural libertine impulses were tempered, and he was particularly critical of Puritan preachers who ‘attached

themselves to women like the serpent applied himself to Eve at the beginning'. The upshot was that he did not find a suitable wife and remained a bachelor.

§

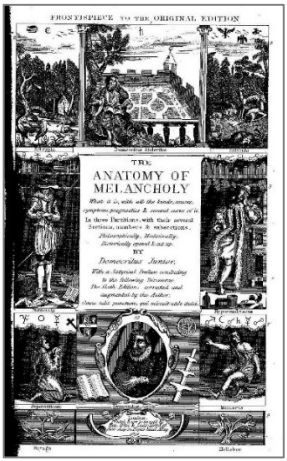
William Drake had arrived at Christ Church, Oxford to begin his studies at the beginning of the Michaelmas Term in autumn 1623, at the age of seventeen[59]. He would have been aware that he had been brought up in Esher Place, the former home of Cardinal Wolsey, and was now entering the college — created upon the dissolution of a twelfth century Augustinian priory and originally called Cardinal College — that Wolsey had founded before his fall from grace, with only three sides of the great Gothic quadrangle, known as Tom Quad, then completed.

The college library where William Drake spent many hours indulging his quest for knowledge, was housed in the former monastic refectory which lay on the south side of the cloister adjacent to the Cathedral. He would have come to know the college librarian, an Oxford don and Church of England minister by the name of Robert Burton, a scholarly, solitary and celibate figure in his late forties, absorbed almost entirely in his books and his writing, in whom William Drake might have recognised a kindred spirit, and who could indeed have encouraged his lifelong interest in reading and self-education, as a form of distraction from the challenges of everyday life.

Robert Burton had recently finalised a revision of his major work, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', first published a couple of years previously in 1621

[59] The Dean of Christ Church, Oxford recorded a Drake 'gentleman' in his registry for the 1623/4 academic year.

in which, despite not possessing a medical background, he had elaborated with great authority, a fulsome history of melancholy: its types, causes and cures.



He had begun it as a result of his own experience, and he appears to have been concerned enough about his physical and mental state in his youth to have consulted Simon Forman, the renowned physician and astrologer in London, who noted his patient's 'great heaviness and drowsiness in the head, pain in the stomach, sluggishness of the blood…and wind in the bowels' and diagnosed melancholy, with the conclusion that 'he carries death upon him'.

In researching and writing his tome, shuttling between his own library at Christ Church and the Bodleian, and collecting evidence from both classical and contemporary medical sources, Burton found solace to the extent that he wrote: "I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business." The ample evidence he found led him to the view that melancholy was a symptom of the human condition, and was to be taken seriously because it impaired normal functioning, and further that it had become an epidemic in his own time;

so he broadened his reading to include religious, philosophical, historical and literary works.

Whilst acknowledging that everybody experienced melancholy individually, Burton identified some common themes such as melancholy arising from love, religion, poverty, stress such as bereavement, and even scholarly pursuits (over-learning). He noted how attitudes had changed across time, from being a sign of madness, possession by the Devil, to even a mark of artistic genius, and also how there appeared to be a hereditary aspect. He focused on the symbiosis between the body and the mind, in which mental anguish gave rise to physical symptoms and, vice versa, where chronic sickness could give rise to depression.

The book became an epic self-help guide, that promoted introspection in order to alter thoughts and behaviours. In addition to the accepted methods of blood-letting and purging, his list of cures, uniquely for his time, were practical and holistic, treating the person not simply the disease: he recognised how sufferers were soothed by the natural world, and recommended fresh air, slow walks in the countryside and swimming in the cold water of rivers and lakes; he proposed appealing to the senses though natural light, warm baths, perfumes, and herbal remedies, and insisted that diet was a core part of recovery by avoiding foods that were difficult to digest, and drinking cordials instead of wine; he recommended rest and relaxation such as listening to soft music or singing in the company of friends, and the importance of undisturbed sleep. He preached moderation, even in religion, whereby the patient should avoid excessive zeal, or neglect of religious duties, but find comfort in prayer and rituals.

Burton seemed to consider his calling as a work in progress and was constantly adding to it, so that the first edition which ran to 900 pages would expand to 2,000 pages (over half a million words) in the sixth and last edition before his death. Fortunately, his writing style was highly engaging — with copious quotations, case studies, anecdotes and digressions — and he was amongst the first authors to be aware of, and speak directly to, his readers.

In his diary, William Drake mentioned Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, but it is not clear when he read it, or how much of it he ploughed through, or what he thought of it, or whether he associated the subject matter with his mother, who might have benefitted from this alternative medicine.

The Survivors

'The matchless rare case...'

Despite the rejoicing at Mrs Drake's timely vision before her untimely death, in the cold light of day the 'cure' had been an abject failure in that she did not live to enjoy God's grace for a longer period, or to witness, in better health, her remaining children grow into adulthood. Dr Hart was not to know (or maybe only became aware much later) that there were other women who had survived similar experiences, even under the guidance of Mr Dod.

When Mr Dod 'retired' from Mrs Drake's case around 1619, worn-out by three years of intense scriptural arguments, the expectation would have been that he returned home to Northamptonshire to recuperate. Instead, selflessly or unwillingly, he ministered to Lady Judith Isham of Lamport Hall who was also suffering from religious melancholy. Like Mrs Drake, her account is known via a secondary source, in this case her daughter Elizabeth Isham who was writing her autobiography in 1638[60], but remembering her mother's illness some twenty years before, that she began with the phrase 'my mother began to be something sad'. There are remarkable similarities: Judith Isham was a sickly woman, often confined to her bedroom; she suffered from a spiritual anxiety and was 'tempted with blasphemous thoughts also of hardness of heart in concealing her wickedness, doubtings and great distrust of Gods mercies'; and the experience with Mr Dod was not without its problems, as Elizabeth wrote 'I am not of their

[60] '[E]xamine my life': writing the self in the early seventeenth century; Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow; https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/researchcurrent/isham/texts. Quotes from original manuscript digitised by Princeton University: 'Autograph manuscript of Elizabeth Isham [ca. 1638]'.

opinion who extol Mr Dod above all others'[61]. The differences were that Judith Isham was never suicidal or delusional, and that she apparently kept a notebook of remembrances detailing the self-examination of her suffering, which is no longer extant but was used by her daughter as a reference. The most jarring contrast, though, is that with the help of her religious adviser, the comfort of friends and the written reflections on her experience, she made a full recovery and lived for a further six years. Her daughter wrote: 'I can no better express my mother's troubles than out of the notes of her own hand-writing, which she kept as remembrances and instructions to herself: how horribly low she was, the Lord leaving her, as it were, to herself [and] the vile visions and outrages, the sinful words the which the tempter did assault her weakness.' Judith Isham also died in 1625, so John Dod would have attended two funerals of his 'cases' that year.

A few years earlier, in 1606-07, Dionys Fitzherbert — a young woman in her mid-twenties living as a lady-in-waiting in the Puritan household of the Countess of Huntingdon at Ashby de la Zouch castle in Leicestershire — suffered a period of religious anxiety that she termed a spiritual battle for her soul[62]. Initially a self-inflicted illness, resulting from a faux pas of which she felt ashamed, this evolved into a conviction (like Mrs Drake) that she was damned after having committed the unpardonable sin against God. This led to blasphemous ravings and hallucinations, in which she became suicidal and felt that her body was breaking apart. But she too, slowly, recovered. After having

[61] This sentiment may also have been due to Mr Dod's close involvement in her own undesired marriage arrangements at the age of eighteen. Despite this opinion, a list of the books in her library made in 1649 included John Dod's 'A plain and familiar exposition of the Ten Commandments', as well as works by Dr John Preston.

[62] See: Katharine Hodgkin (ed.), Women, Madness and Sin in Early Modern England: The Autobiographical Writings of Dionys Fitzherbert, The Early Modern Englishwoman, 1500–1750: Contemporary Editions (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

been confined to her room for a month, she was cared for first by a Dr Carter and his wife in London until the delusions receded, then was sent home to her family in Oxfordshire, and finally to the peace and quiet of Wales, where normality returned. Like Judith and Elizabeth Isham, she wrote down her experiences in an autobiographical form, partly to offer support and comfort (as Mrs Drake also wished) to those in similar circumstances. There were other tensions influencing Dionys Fitzherbert's behaviour that chime with Mrs Drake's account, such as the question of marriage causing family conflict, her financial worries, and the constraints of social conventions for independently-minded women[63].

We cannot from such a distance know what was medically wrong with Mrs Drake, that may have contributed to her demise rather than recovery. Her physical symptoms could have been caused by any of a number of disorders, but even at the time it was recognised that chronic health conditions and psychological problems were linked and impacted each other. It is also clear that in comparison to the survivors, other factors may have contributed to her dire predicament, such as the lack of a comforting circle of female friends. Dr Hart mentions only three women who had a role in supporting Mrs Drake through her suffering: her mother, Mrs Tothill; Sarah Harris, a gentlewoman and 'cousin'[64]; and Susannah Garbrand, her waiting-woman. The impression is that Mrs Drake did not have close companions of her own age, or that they had fallen by the wayside as a result of her troubles. However, in late 1622, Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher made her will[65] in which she bequeathed 'to my

[63] See Katherine Hodgkin, as cited.
[64] In this period 'cousin' had a broader meaning, and could refer to any familial relationship, especially when unclear, or simply friendship.
[65] The will of Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher was made on 9th December 1622, and proved on 11th November 1623. Francis Drake was a witness. (TNA 11/142/498)

loving friend Mrs Joan Drake, the wife of Francis Drake Esquire, my needlework cushion made with flowers called water flowers'. She may not have been alone in her suffering after all; it is now possible to picture Mrs Drake sitting in bed, caressing (or maybe still working on) the needlework cushion with its floral pattern imitating the water lilies which floated upon her precious pond garden beyond the orchards at Esher Place, and reminiscing about the times she had spent in the company of her recently departed friend.

Her Grand Case

'And now that we have brought this good creature into Heaven, good Reader give me leave, out of all which has been said (for memory's sake) to sum up briefly her grand Case; lest it should be mistaken.'

The serendipity of history has provided two written sources of evidence of Mrs Drake's later life and her relationship with her loyal spiritual adviser. The letters testify that Dr John Hart's intentions — to help her find peace — were, at least initially, virtuous and beyond reproach; but his book, a treasure trove of literary eyewitness detail, unwittingly exposes the reality that her untimely death was an unintended consequence of the all-engulfing cure for which, with the backing of her husband and parents, he placed himself front and centre, orchestrating proceedings. He had tapped into the close-knit community of like-minded souls in the counties around the capital and in the midlands, who were dismayed at the ungodly ways of the world, and wished for a more direct conversation with God, unhindered by the man-made church hierarchy where superstitious practices still lingered. Such people set up their own congregations and marvelled at the dramatic and uplifting sermons of preachers, like John Rogers, who were learned men trained at Cambridge and Oxford in scripture, grammar, logic and rhetoric, and who refused to conform to the royal proclamations aimed at creating uniform standards and practices within the Protestant church. For this they were 'silenced' by the authorities, like John Dod and Thomas Hooker, losing their tenures and incomes and being forced to find patronage from Puritan sympathisers amongst the gentry families, such as the Drakes, the Veres, the Ishams, the Barringtons, and the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon. This network of contacts was maintained by meetings over dinner

in various safe houses, attended by the likes of Dr John Burges and Ezekiel Culverwell, and by correspondence with supportive senior figures within the mainstream church, such as Bishop James Ussher[66] or Dr John Preston, where points of doctrine were debated, news was shared and help requested, as it was by Dr John Hart. Locally, there were conforming local ministers willing to offer a non-judgmental ear, such as Mr Wetherell or Dr Gibson. By these means, the details of Mrs Drake's case spread far and wide, attracting visitors, such as John Forbes exiled from Scotland and resident in Holland, and advice by post, such as from another Scotsman, Robert Bruce. For a decade she was the embodiment of one of the Puritans' thorniest issues, the worst case of a seeming epidemic of religious melancholy. Hers was a cure that had to succeed because otherwise the Puritan network, and its foundational tenets, would have been seen to fail. There was joy, not despair, at the manner of her death.

In Dr Hart's defence to the gratuitous charge of manslaughter, one could argue that Mrs Drake was beset by a whole range of insuperable problems: physical illness; mental troubles and spiritual anxiety; dislike of her husband; worry over their financial woes; distress over her inability to uphold the duties of a good wife and manage the household; suspicion of Puritanism yet beset by its daily burdens; the quandary, and guilt, over her feelings for John Hart; and the heartbreak of the loss of her precious last child. But the fervent presence of so many divines, over so many years, was not conducive to her wellbeing. Yet, if she could not write her own story to achieve solace, she was at least fortunate to have Dr Hart as a spiritual adviser and confidant, who faithfully noted everything down. Thus, most poignantly for posterity, in addition to the main

[66] For a comprehensive analysis of Ussher's network of correspondents, see: Elizabethanne Boran, 'An Early Friendship Network of James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh, 1626-56', in European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter Reformation (Dublin, 1998) pp. 116-34.

religious message of his text, we are privileged to observe, as he did, her struggles and coping mechanisms, and to relive the complex and intriguing arc of their relationship.

For all of the above, Mrs Drake deserves to be better remembered and spoken about with the same reverence as the celebrated women diarists and writers of remembrances or personal letters, as an all too rare voice — even if filtered through Dr Hart — of a woman in the early modern period facing up to her uniquely challenging circumstances.

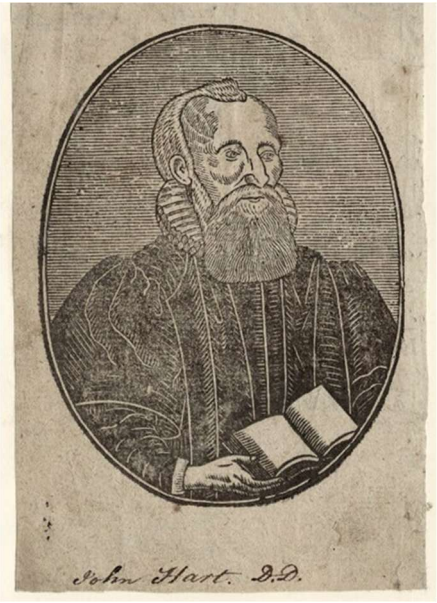
Epilogue: Brief Lives (concluded)

Dr John Hart (her spiritual adviser and confidant)

At some unknown date, a Latin inscription dedicated to Mrs Drake was added beneath the bust of her son William in the Drake Chapel in St Mary's church in Amersham. This confirmed some genealogical details: 'she departed this life at the age of forty, whilst engaged in heavenly matters, having left behind her husband, two sons, and a single daughter'. It also made reference to the book written by 'a worthy author' which was qualified with the phrase 'no more than a witness'. How was this meant to be understood — that there was a widespread belief that the Relater was, in fact, more than just an observer? And who commissioned the plaque?

John Hart's book was not the end of his literary career, and there were a number of other later publications of his[67], either as author or editor, and a woodblock portrait of him as an old man appeared on the frontispiece of some of them. One publisher even offered a second volume of his collected works, as a 'famous author'. Apart from this, no other facts are known, not even the dates of his birth and death, and whether he ever married.

[67] As researched in the EEBO-TCP corpus consisting of the works represented in the Early English Books Online collections known as Short Title Catalogues I and II (based on the Pollard & Redgrave and Wing short title catalogues respectively), as well as the Thomason Tracts and the Early English Books Tract Supplement collections. Together these trace the history of English thought from the first book printed in English in 1475 through to 1700.



John Dod as an older man, from a frontispiece of a book

Francis Drake (her husband)

Francis Drake remarried twice, firstly to Philadelphia Davies with whom he had a daughter, Mary, born in 1630; and then to Anne White. He pursued a parliamentary career until his death in 1634. In his will, he left the Manor of Walton-on-Thames to his younger son Francis, on the basis that William had already been well provided for by inheritance from the Tothills. William was instead offered 'the pictures in the gallery at Esher at his choice with the largest hangings in the great chamber there and other furniture.' Amongst other bequests he left £30 to 'Joan Hooker who lives in New England at her marriage', and £10 to John Dod.

William Drake (her eldest son)

William Drake was not pleased with the paltry offer in his father's will and objected, attempting to obtain administration of the estate on the spurious grounds of intestacy. This may have been due to the manor of Esher having been already sold, since in 1635 it was purchased by George Price from a William Russell who had owned it since 1613[68]. William Drake had enough funds, though, to buy the manor of Amersham, where he was a (largely inactive) member of parliament, and was knighted and appointed 1st Baronet of Shardeloes in 1641. A bibliophile and scholarly man, he spent the Civil War and Interregnum years in Europe, returning at the Restoration in 1660, and died unmarried in 1669.

Francis Drake (her younger son)

Unlike his brother, Francis (or 'Frank' as he was known) Drake of Walton-on-Thames was an active Parliamentarian MP during the Civil War. Locally, he was best known for harassing the Diggers who had set up an encampment on common land on St George's Hill in 1649, where he organised attacks in an attempt to drive them away. He married three times, the first of which gave him connections with the Verney family, now famous for the survival of more than 30,000 family letters from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In one of these, Lady Mary Verney wrote to her husband in 1648 about Frank Drake that: 'there is no trust to be given to anything he says, for he is one day so kind and the next so churlish that there is no dealing with him and he has not kindness to anybody but for his own ends.' The proliferation of loans received against his manor, and subsequent court records over several decades,

[68] See 'Title of Mr George Price to the manor of Esher Episcopi' SHC G3/1/36

suggests that he was not careful with money, which was confirmed by a spell in a debtor's prison. In William Drake's will, he referred to his younger sibling as 'my unfortunate brother', who only lived for another year.

Joan Drake (her only daughter)

Whilst Mrs Drake doted on her ill-fated youngest son, John, there is no evidence how she felt about her only daughter, Joan, whose birth she maintained was the cause of the escalation of her illness. Aged around nineteen, she married John Parker, a London haberdasher, in St Ann, Blackfriars on the 28th May 1634, a couple of months after the death of her father, with the support of her two brothers, William and Frank, who signed a 'mutual agreement' with the bride and groom on the same day. It is tempting to envisage Dr Hart, still resident in nearby Whitefriars, in attendance.

John Parker died a little more than five years later, in August 1639, and it is from his will[69] (and Boyd's 'Citizens of London and Family Units') that the family background emerges. He was married previously to Bridget, who died in 1630, and seven births were recorded in the parish church of St Pancras to them. Of these only a daughter, also named Bridget (born in 1629) survived to witness his second marriage. John Parker and Joan Drake had four daughters: Sarah (born in 1635), Joan (1636), Mary and Elizabeth.

John Parker had connections with New England where a brother, James, was living with his family. There must have been talk in the household of joining them in the New World, as he began his will with the words: "for my

[69] See Genealogical Gleanings in England, by Henry F. Waters vol.2; published by Princeton University, 1901. p. 578.

burial, I cannot tell whether I shall die in England, at sea or beyond the seas." Another of his brothers, Joseph, left a will in 1642 in London, in which his five nieces (John Parker's daughters) received a bequest of £50 each. Amongst other relatives and in-laws, there is no mention of Joan Parker (née Drake). It would appear that she died sometime between 1639 and 1642, only reaching her mid-twenties.

John Dod (her nemesis)

Already a holy man highly regarded amongst reformists for his learning and preaching, John Dod's reputation only increased as he aged. He had written his most famous work 'A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments' in 1615, which gave him a nickname that would stick: Decalogue Dod. Quotes from these, and his sermons, were later collected into another volume, 'The Celebrated Sayings of Old Mr Dod', and it was common practice for ordinary people to remove pages and paste them onto the walls of their cottages as inspiration.

During the Civil War his house in Canons Ashby was raided three times by Royalist forces, who ransacked his belongings — on one occasion including the sheets of the bed on which he was lying — and threatened to end his life, to which he professed to be unconcerned: 'if you do, you will send me to heaven, where I long to be.' When he eventually died, in 1645 at the age of ninety-six, he was feted by great men, including Archbishop James Ussher who declared 'I desire that when I die my soul may rest with his.'

Dr James Ussher (her frequent visitor)

In 1625, as Mrs Drake lay dying, Dr Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, the most senior position in the Church of Ireland. For some, this would have been a life's ambition, but Ussher had an obsession, which was to write a Christian history of the world, from creation to the death of Christ. His initial goal was, therefore, to calculate the precise date and time when God created the heavens and the earth — by adding up all of the genealogical information in the bible; putting a precise figure on the gap of indeterminate length between the Old and New Testaments; and cross-referencing mentions of historical events or celestial phenomena — which resulted in what became known as 'Ussher's Chronology': The universe began at 6 o'clock in the evening on the 22nd October 4004 BC.

The rest of his great book, "The Annals of the World", remained to be researched and written, but luck (or God) was not on his side. He was in London in 1641, when he learned of the Irish Catholic Rebellion that had plundered his Bishop's palace, but had thankfully not destroyed his library, which he arranged to have shipped over. Then the Civil War in England broke out, and as an appointee of the King, he joined the Royalists in Oxford, where he continued his studies at the university. When the tide turned against King Charles I, Ussher was forced to flee and was heading for Cardiff with his wife and daughter, when he was ambushed by thieves, who broke open the chests containing the only copy of his manuscript, which was scattered by the wind across the hillside. Devastated, he implored the priests in the local area to ask their parishioners to keep a lookout for papers and, incredibly, after two or three months, he was able to regather a great deal of his precious pages. He remained in London, and despite his Royalist support, his intellectual and literary achievements were

such that Oliver Cromwell gave him a state funeral and he was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1656.

Thomas Hooker (her curate)

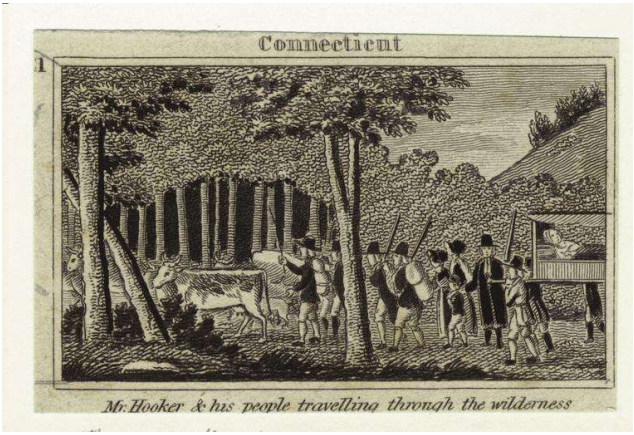
Thomas Hooker had studied Mrs Drake between 1620 and 1622-23, and then providently returned to witness her salvation in 1625, and this experience became the foundation for his theological thinking and writing. Four years later in 1629, having been forced to retire from his Lecturer role, he set up a small school in his rented house in rural Essex and in his spare time produced his celebrated work "The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ"[70]. Perhaps because he made general guidelines from the specifics of Mrs Drake's case (without mentioning her name), his book is still considered by Christians today as 'timeless and relevant' which although written in the style of centuries ago 'still manages, with the use of colourful analogies, to speak to current spiritual lives'[71].

A legal summons connected to his nonconformist views led to a decision to leave England for The Netherlands, where he stayed with Mr Forbes (Mrs Drake's least enduring divine) for two years before setting out for the New World in 1633. In Boston, Hooker became the first pastor at Newtown (now Cambridge, Massachusetts), and three years later, as a result of the influx of immigrants and overcrowding, he led a party of settlers from his church community, known as "Hooker's Company", one hundred miles to the southwest, where he established the Connecticut River Colony, and set up its capital at Hartford. Inspired by a sermon Hooker gave on civil government, the

[70] Originally published in 1629.
[71] Recent reviews on Amazon and Good Reads.

fledgling colony decided to create a constitution — adopted in 1639 and called the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut — in which the principles of modern democracy to establish a representative government, and to set up its structure and powers, were first written down. Notably, the document confirmed that the colony was a self-governing 'law unto themselves', and did not contain any reference to the British Crown. Hooker is still referred to as "The Father of American Democracy" and the official nickname of the state of Connecticut, which grew from Hooker's colony, is "The Constitution State".

Thomas Hooker died aged sixty-one in Hartford during the influenza epidemic of 1647, which spread throughout all of the New England colonies and was initially blamed on witchcraft. This led to the first execution of a witch in North America, Alice Young, who was hanged at the Meeting House Square in Hooker's hometown.



It is interesting to note that the reclining woman being carried through the North American wilderness, is Mrs Drake's waiting-woman, Susannah Garbrand, now known as Mrs Hooker.

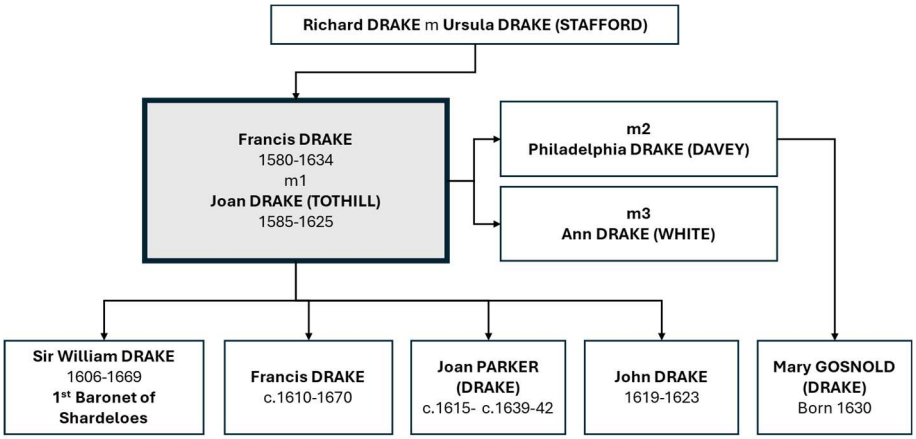
Timeline, Family Tree, Memorials, Hart's Letters, Maps

Timeline

Date	Event
1603	Francis Drake of Esher married Joan Tothill of Shardeloes (3rd March 1603).
1610	The Drakes attend Ben Jonson's play 'The Alchemist' at the Blackfriars Theatre in London.
c. 1615	Mrs Drake's health and spiritual anxiety spiralled downwards after the birth of her daughter Joan.
1616	John Hart, Doctor of Divinity, was introduced to Mrs Drake. He dedicated a book to his new patrons. 'J. Heart' wrote his first letter to Dr Ussher (June).
1616-19	Attempts made to 'cure' Mrs Drake over 3 years by John Dod. J. Heart wrote further letters to Dr Ussher (March 1617 and July 1618).
1619	Birth of John Drake, third son of Francis and Joan, but not mentioned at all in Hart's account. Hart made a secret trip to Essex in an attempt to find an alternative place for Mrs Drake to live.
c. 1619	Dr James Ussher made several visits. He was in England between 1619 and 1621 buying books for his library in Dublin.
1620	Thomas Hooker was made rector of St George's Church in Esher, and lived at Esher Place in order to help Mrs Drake.
1621	Hooker married Mrs Drake's waiting-woman (April 3rd) and left for Essex (probably in 1622-3). Robert Burton published 'The Anatomy of Melancholy'.
1623	John Drake died, aged three; Willam Drake began studying at Christ Church, Oxford.
1625	On Easter Monday 18th April, Mrs Drake died after a rapturous vision at Shardeloes (aged around 40,

	although her actual birthdate is unknown); Dod, Hooker and Hart were reunited in attendance. Dr Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh.
1629	Thomas Hooker wrote "The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ" based on his experiences with Mrs Drake.
1634	Francis Drake, having married twice more, died and was buried at Walton-on-Thames (17th March; aged 54).
1647	Dr John Hart published his version of events, "Down Trodden Strength or Mrs Drake Revived", under the pseudonym Hart On-Hi; Thomas Hooker died in Connecticut, the colony he had founded.

Drakes of Esher Family Tree



Drakes of Esher Family Tree

Mrs Drake's Memorial in the Drake Chapel, St. Mary's Church, Amersham

TO THE GLORIE OF GOD TO YE BLESSED MEMORIE OF MRS JOANE DRAKE

WIFE TO FRANCIS DRAKE OF ESHERE IN YE COUNTIE OF SUR[REY]

ONE OF YE GENTLEMEN OF HIS MAJESTIE'S MOST HO: PRIVIE CHAMBER IN ORDINARY

ESQ DAUGHTER TO WILLIAM TOTHILL OF SHARLEES ONE OF THE 6 CLARKES

OF YE HIGH COURT OF CHANNCERIE ESQUIER

WHO WHILST SHEE LIVED WAS A PATTERNE OF ALL VIRTUES OF A GRATIOUS WOMAN

& WIFE AS HIGHLY ESTEEMED OF ALL GOOD T[HAT] KNEW HER AS LOWLY IN

HER OWNE EYES

A LIVING MONUMENT

Of Gods mercie Above Satans malice; Of his wonders in Casting downe his Children t[hat] hee may raise them up; Of the truth of his p[ro]mises in refreshing the weary soule; Of the force of faythfull prayer; Of the power of Godlines even in this life

FOR HAVING FOUGHT YE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH & WAYTED FOR THE SALVATION OF GOD

SHEE OBTEYNED A GLORIOUS VICTORIE & BEGINNING YE LIFE OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH

WAS TRANSLATED FROM EARTH TRYUMPHANTLY TO HEAVEN

18 APRILL ANNO DNI 1625 HAVING SENT BEFORE HER HER DEARE CHILD JOHN D

WHOM SHEE HAD NURSED HER SELFE & BY WHOM SHEE LIETH

BURIED & LEAVING BEHIND HER 2 SONNES & ONE DAUGHTER VIZ WILLIAM, FRANCIS,

AND JOANE DRAKE, HER HUSBAND LAMENTING HIS OWNE LOSSE

YET REJOYSING IN HER GAINE, DEDICATETH THIS MONUMENT

Child Brass of John Drake 1619-23 in the Drake Chapel (Source: Amersham Museum)

Inscription Beneath Bust of Sir William Drake (1606-1669)

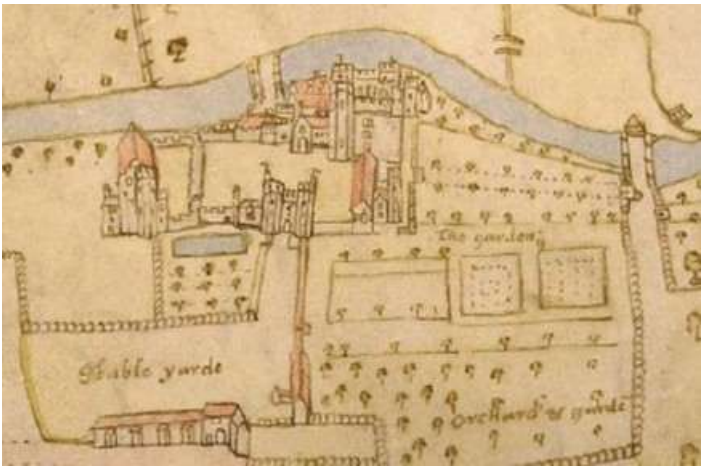
(Translated from Latin)

Joan Tothill, daughter of William and Katherine and wife of Francis Drake (from the ancient family of the Drakes of a not humble village named Ash, originating from Devonshire), was in matrimony, if any woman ever existed, of remarkable character, of uncommon humanity, both by nature and by grace, with exceptional qualities. She was so distinguished in the worship of piety that she was even written about *by a worthy author, no more than a witness*[72]. Her life was renowned, and from her life the book captured the love she had to give. I would say in a word that her life and her holy death were equal; she departed this life at the age of forty, while engaged in heavenly matters, having left behind her husband, two sons, and a single daughter, together with an example by which others might learn both to live and to die.

[72] The Latin reads: 'Idoneo Auctore, non magis quam Teste'.

Page from letter to Dr James Ussher from London dated 12th March 1616/17, mentioning Mrs Drake's name, and signed by 'J Heart' (Source: Bodleian library MS. Rawl. Lett. 89 fols. 9r-12r).

Maps



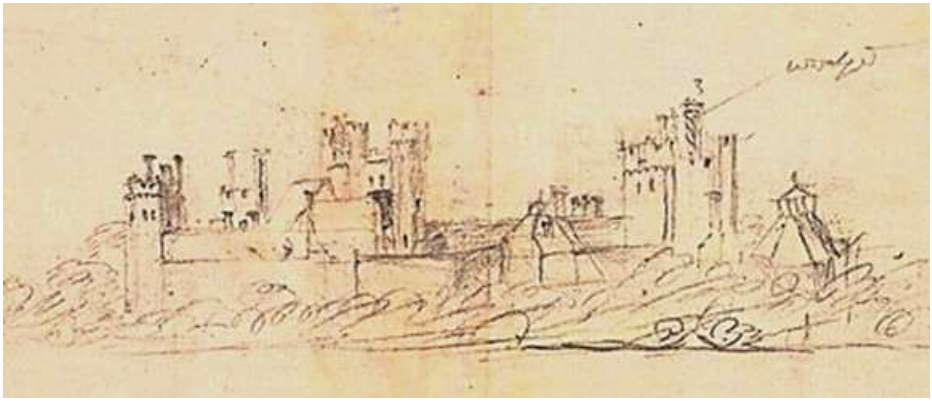
Esher Place 1606 (Treswell's map – close up)

Esher Place 1606 (Treswell's map – updated)

After his father's death in 1603 and his inheritance of Esher Place, Francis Drake commissioned an estate plan. He chose Ralph Treswell senior

(1540-1616) as surveyor due to his reputation for having completed 53 detailed plans in the City of London, Southwark, and Westminster, and for a similar job mapping the estates of Sir Christopher Hatton in Dorset.

The full map of 1606 is a bird's eye view of the manor of Esher, showing Esher Place at the centre with its main castellated building, bishop's chapel, imposing gatehouse, outbuildings, stables, gardens, orchards and ponds. In addition, Treswell has drawn the location of other dwellings, naming the occupants of the larger houses, and included field names and ownership.



Esher Place 1673 (Bodleian Library MS Aubrey 4 Folio 45br)

In 1673, John Aubrey, an antiquary, archaeologist and biographer[73], was commissioned to undertake a survey of Surrey, which he called a 'Perambulation', as part of a project to produce an atlas of England. Although he did not fully complete his work, his detailed drawings and notes survived.

[73] John Aubrey (1626-97) is best known for 'Brief Lives', his collection of short, informal biographies of contemporaries and famous people.

Amongst these were his impressions of ‘Esher House’, which ‘lies low at the foot of a steep hill, northward; it is stately and strongly built of brick of the Gothic architecture; a castle-like palace…’.

In 2006, the Time Team used the results of their archaeological investigations, together with Treswell’s map and Aubrey’s sketches, to create a 3D reconstruction of Esher Place.

Esher Place reconstruction (Time Team Channel 4 S13 Ep4 2006)

Esher Place and the Parsonage at Walton-on-Thames

Book Club Questions

Mrs Drake's Character

What is the significance of the title 'The Museum of Melancholy: The Divine Case of Mrs Drake'?

How does the book portray Mrs Drake's personality? What aspects of her character stood out?

Attitudes to Melancholy

How did the divines' religious doctrines impact how they viewed Mrs Drake's illness and her treatment?

How did Mrs Drake fight back against those wishing to control her? How effective was she?

What does the story reveal about family dynamics during that period?

What broader societal themes are explored through Mrs Drake's personal experiences?

Would the remedies that Robert Burton proposed in 'the Anatomy of Melancholy' have helped Mrs Drake?

Why did other women of the period survive similar episodes of melancholy?

Relationship with Dr John Hart

What were Dr Hart's feelings towards Mrs Drake? Why might he have been so keen to help?

How did Mrs Drake view Dr Hart? Are there indications of anything more than gratitude for his arranging her religious care?

How do you understand Dr Hart's own account of the argument in the garden? Why did he choose to include it?

Did Mrs Drake and Dr Hart plan to elope together? Could her youngest son have been Dr Hart's child? Why else might she have nursed him herself?

What did Mrs Drake mean by her declaration on her deathbed to Dr Hart?

What responsibility should Dr Hart carry for Mrs Drake's death?

Dr Hart's account is described as a 'biography, memoir, eulogy and love letter'. Do you agree?

Was Dr Hart a reliable narrator?

Why did Dr Hart write his book? Why might he have waited more than 20 years to publish?

Modern Relevance

Compare Mrs Drake's experiences with modern understandings of mental health and treatment, and also of male attitudes to women. What progress has been made, and what challenges remain?

Sources

By year of publication

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About the Author

C.L. Dawson is a local historian from Elmbridge in Surrey. Unsurprisingly, given the proximity of Hampton Court, his preferred periods are the Tudors and Stuarts. He focuses on researching and writing engaging stories involving local people, ideally finding connections where they came into contact with famous faces or key events, and whenever possible using eyewitness accounts from antique books, letters, diaries, pamphlets, and other primary sources.

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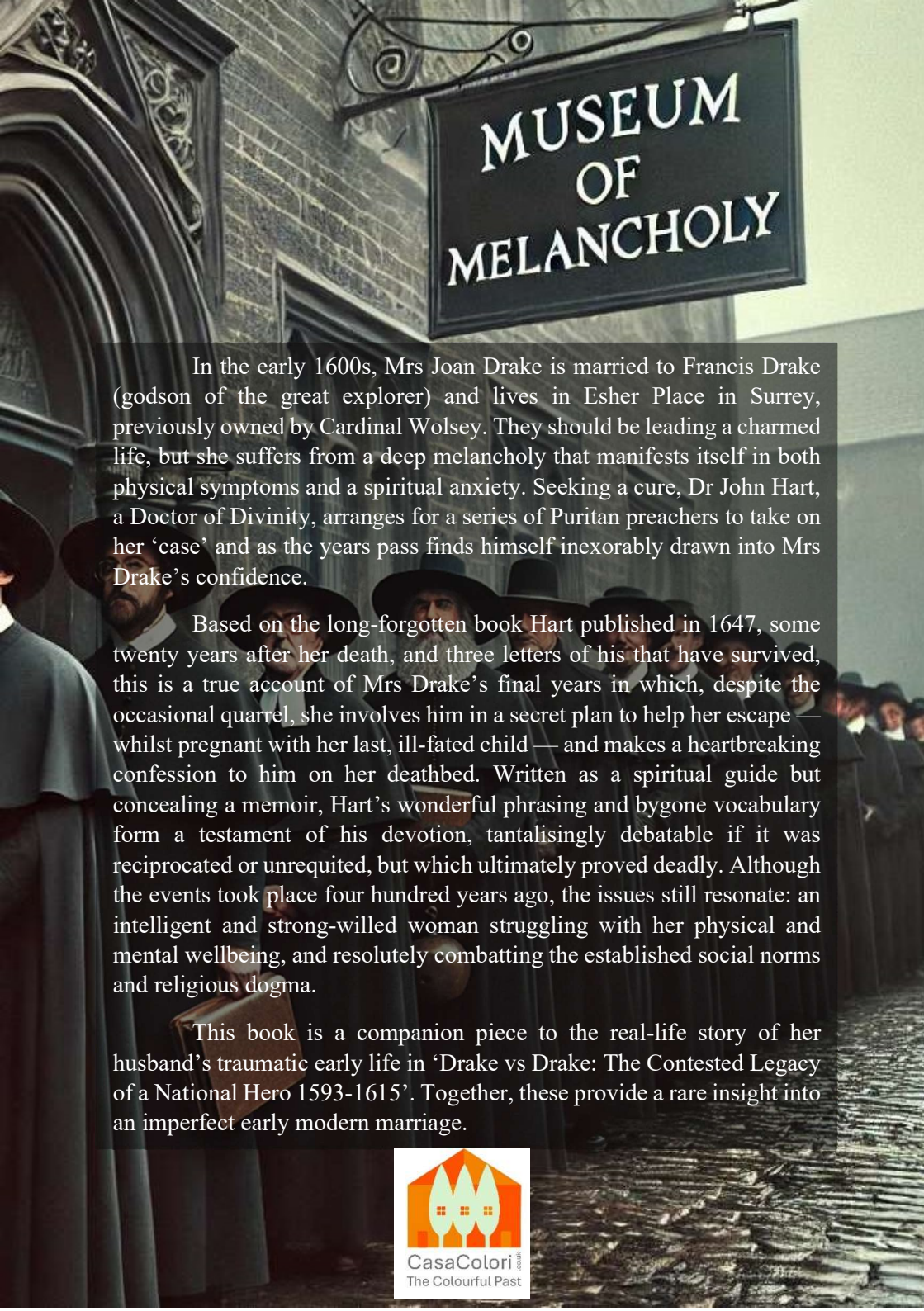

In the early 1600s, Mrs Joan Drake is married to Francis Drake (godson of the great explorer) and lives in Esher Place in Surrey, previously owned by Cardinal Wolsey. They should be leading a charmed life, but she suffers from a deep melancholy that manifests itself in both physical symptoms and a spiritual anxiety. Seeking a cure, Dr John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, arranges for a series of Puritan preachers to take on her 'case' and as the years pass finds himself inexorably drawn into Mrs Drake's confidence.

Based on the long-forgotten book Hart published in 1647, some twenty years after her death, and three letters of his that have survived, this is a true account of Mrs Drake's final years in which, despite the occasional quarrel, she involves him in a secret plan to help her escape — whilst pregnant with her last, ill-fated child — and makes a heartbreaking confession to him on her deathbed. Written as a spiritual guide but concealing a memoir, Hart's wonderful phrasing and bygone vocabulary form a testament of his devotion, tantalisingly debatable if it was reciprocated or unrequited, but which ultimately proved deadly. Although the events took place four hundred years ago, the issues still resonate: an intelligent and strong-willed woman struggling with her physical and mental wellbeing, and resolutely combatting the established social norms and religious dogma.

This book is a companion piece to the real-life story of her husband's traumatic early life in 'Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1615'. Together, these provide a rare insight into an imperfect early modern marriage.

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