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Sir Thomas Browne's
Annotated Copy of His 1642
Religio Medici

BROOKE CONTI

ALTHOUGH relatively few readers today may have heard of Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682), the works of this essayist, doctor, and amateur scientist cast long literary shadows. Among those influenced or inspired by Browne are Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Herman Melville, Virginia Woolf, Jorge Luis Borges, and W. G. Sebald. The admiration of later generations has to do in part with Browne's style, for he is widely regarded as one of the finest prose writers in the English language. However, Browne's wide-ranging intellectual interests, his love of paradoxes, and his playful personality have surely also contributed to his popularity. Combining a skeptical, scientific temperament with a fascination with religion and its mysteries, Browne seems to many readers to embody the most appealing elements of Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution.

Today, Browne's reputation as a restlessly protean figure is based primarily upon his first work, *Religio Medici* (A Doctor's Religion). Written in an age of increasing religious intolerance, Browne's leisurely meditation on faith, reason, and the relationship between the two provides a genial take on the divisive issues of the day. Readers in the centuries since Browne's own have tended to find the *Religio* refreshingly tolerant and even "modern" in its sensibility, but the work was popular from the first, going through eight editions in its author's lifetime. If the *Religio* brought Browne into the public eye, the work for which he was most celebrated in his own day was *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (usually rendered in English as "Vulgar Errors"). In this work—first published in 1646 and revised, expanded, and republished five more times before its author's death—Browne attempts to address a wide range of "commonly presumed truths," such as the

I am grateful to Margaret Sherry Rich and the Friends of the Princeton University Library for the research fellowship that allowed me the opportunity to make this study of Sir Thomas Browne's annotated *Religio Medici*.

elephant's lack of knees or the efficacy of goat's blood to break diamonds. Although such a book might sound like a tedious catalog of early modern beliefs and misapprehensions, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is at least as much a meditation on the nature and persistence of human error. Both *Pseudodoxia* and the *Religio*, then, might be seen as examinations of knowledge itself.

But if the two works have many things in common, their publication history is not one of them. Whereas Browne appears always to have intended *Pseudodoxia* for the press, when he published the *Religio* in 1643, he protested that he did so with the greatest reluctance and only because circumstances had forced him into it. The previous year, an edition of the *Religio*—which had been circulating in manuscript for the better part of a decade—had been published without Browne's knowledge or his name on its title page.¹ In his preface to the 1643 printing, Browne claims that it is only the “depraved” state of that first printed edition that has led him to provide a new one: he wants to make sure that what the public is reading is what he actually wrote.

It is true that the 1642 printing contains many textual corruptions, the apparent result of the *Religio*'s having been transcribed, successively, by a variety of hands. (See the accompanying table of editions.) However, as the preface continues, it becomes clear that Browne is as anxious to explain and excuse the *nature* of his work as he is to provide the public with “a full and intended copy” of it (“To the Reader”). Although Browne never disavows his work, he emphasizes that it was composed some seven years earlier as “a private exercise directed to my selfe,” and thus the opinions registered therein should certainly not be taken as “an example or rule unto any other [person]” (“To the Reader”). Browne repeats this last point several times, coyly suggesting that he *might* have grown out of some of the idiosyncratic positions that he takes in the body of the work; but he never says that he *has*, and neither does he specify just which beliefs he might be referring to.

¹ Actually, there are two slightly different printed versions of both the 1642 unauthorized edition and the 1643 edition. See Jean-Jacques Denonain's introduction to his first edition of the *Religio*: Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), xxii–xxvii. Except where otherwise specified, all quotations from the *Religio* refer to this edition, which will be cited in the text by part and section number.

c. 1635	First edition composed; limited copies circulate in manuscript
c. 1638–1640	Second (revised) edition; manuscript copies circulate more widely
1642	First printing (unauthorized), apparently set from a manuscript of the work's second edition
1643	Third edition (second printing), based on Browne's changes to the 1642 printing

Although authorial professions of reluctance to publish are a standard trope of early modern print culture and should usually be taken with at least a grain of salt,² Browne's haste in preparing a new printing of the *Religio* and his obvious uneasiness about its content have led most scholars to conclude that his dismay at the unauthorized printing of his work was genuine.³ The evidence, however, is far from certain. A century after the 1643 printing, Samuel Johnson suggested that either Browne himself or a surrogate might have conveyed the manuscript to the printer; and one of Browne's major twentieth-century editors, Jean-Jacques Denonain, though not sharing Johnson's skepticism, has likewise noted the peculiarity of Browne's choice of Andrew Crook, the publisher of the 1642 (unauthorized) printing, for his authorized edition: a writer whose work had been pirated would seem unlikely subsequently to seek out the services of that pirate.⁴ Whether or not Browne played any role in the *Religio*'s first

² See, for example, J. W. Saunders, "The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry," *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951), 143–46.

³ See, for example, Geoffrey Keynes, "Introduction," in *Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings*, ed. Keynes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); N. J. Endicott, "Some Aspects of Self-Revelation and Self-Portraiture in *Religio Medici*," in *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, ed. Millar MacLure and F. W. Watt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 85; Marta Straznicky, "Performing the Self in Browne's *Religio Medici*," *Prose Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990), 211; Roland Huebert, "The Private Opinions of Sir Thomas Browne," *Studies in English Literature* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 117.

⁴ See Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Sir Thomas Browne," reprinted in *Sir Thomas Browne: The Major Works*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 485–86, and Jean-Jacques Denonain's introduction to his later edition of *Religio Medici*

printing may be impossible to resolve definitively, but an examination of manuscript and early printed versions of the work, and especially of a unique item held by Princeton University Library's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, tells us more than has previously been known about Browne's revision of the *Religio*—and suggests why he might have been nervous about its publication in the first place.



In its final published form, the *Religio* consists of seventy-five sections, each a brief essay that takes one particular aspect of Christianity as its starting point. These sections are themselves grouped into two unequal parts, roughly corresponding to the double law of charity: duties toward God and duties toward neighbor.⁵ Although Browne announces himself to be a contented member of the Church of England, in the course of the *Religio* he freely investigates a variety of theological and natural phenomena, and he asserts the importance of following his own reason when biblical or ecclesiastical authorities differ. As he states in one of the work's most famous passages, "I love to lose my selfe in a mystery. . . 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involv'd aenigma's and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnation, and Resurrection. I can answer all the objections of Satan, and my rebellious reason with that odde resolution I learned of *Tertullian*, *Certum est, quia impossibile est* [It is certain because it is impossible]" (1.9).

Statements like this have led many readers to see Browne as a charmingly tolerant and broad-minded individual.⁶ Even if the work

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), x. For a more recent critic who shares Johnson's skepticism, see Samuel Glen Wong, "Constructing a Critical Subject in *Religio Medici*," *Studies in English Literature* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2003), esp. 119–20, 122–23.

⁵The first manuscript version of the *Religio* has fifty-four numbered sections but is not divided into parts; the second version (both manuscript and unauthorized printing) is divided into parts but not sections. The third version (the 1643 printing) has both section and part divisions.

⁶See, for example, Joan Webber, *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 151; William P. Dunn, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Study in Religious Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950), 37; Murray Roston, "The 'Doubting' Thomas," in *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne: The Ann Arbor Tercentenary Lectures and Essays*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Co-



cannot be taken as straight autobiography, they say, Browne, through his authorial persona, is modeling for his audience an approach to religion very like the *via media* of the English Church.⁷ However, from my own study of the *Religio*, I would argue that Browne is not nearly as relaxed and easygoing as he seems. Indeed, I believe that the *Religio* was written not out of the tolerationist spirit that many ascribe to Browne, but rather out of real doubts about his own orthodoxy.

As Browne claims in the prefatory letter to the 1643 printing, the *Religio* appears to have been first composed in 1634 or 1635, as Browne was approaching his thirtieth birthday. Born into a relatively prosperous London family, Browne received his B.A. and M.A. from Oxford in 1626 and 1629, respectively, and shortly thereafter left for the Continent, where he studied medicine in Montpellier, Padua, and Leiden; he received his medical degree from the last of these in December 1633. As his biographers have noted, Browne availed himself of the best medical education of his day while at the same time conducting a sort of tour of the religious life of the Continent: Huguenot France, Catholic Italy, and Reformed Protestant Holland. However, Browne's years abroad would have exposed him to more than simply different orthodoxies. All three of the universities at which he studied were strikingly independent of their local civil and ecclesiastical authorities; all three attracted students from across Europe; and at least two of the three were associated with notable heresies and heterodoxies, some of which would later make an appearance in the *Religio*.⁸

This first version of the *Religio*, apparently written just after Browne's return from the Continent, differs in many important ways from both the version that was published in 1642 and Browne's revised version of 1643. In fact, although the 1643 version has been

lumbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 69–79; Jonathan F. S. Post, *Sir Thomas Browne* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 90.

⁷See, for example, Victoria Silver, "Liberal Theology and Sir Thomas Browne's 'Soft and Flexible' Discourse," *English Literary Renaissance* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 69–105; Leonard Nathanson, *The Strategy of Truth: A Study of Sir Thomas Browne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 116–28.

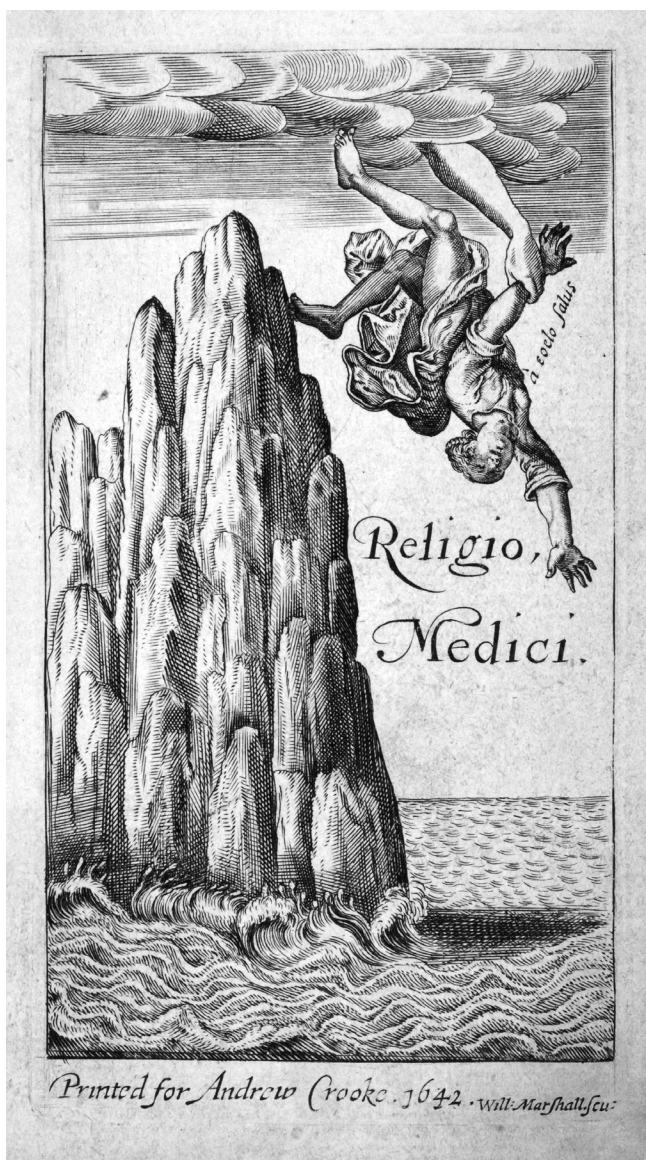
⁸For the climate of religious tolerance at these universities, see Jeremiah Finch, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Doctor's Life of Science and Faith* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 57, 67, 75–76; Antonino Poppi, *Ricerche sulla teologia e la scienza nella scuola padovana del cinque e seicento* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2001), 23–34, 101–23; Christine Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 134, 155.

used as the basis for all subsequent publications of the work, from the seventeenth century up until our own, it is more accurate to think of the *Religio* as existing in three closely related but distinct versions. Any attempt to analyze the work or Browne's motives in writing it must therefore take these separate versions into account. The original version of the *Religio* appears to have circulated in manuscript among what was probably a small number of friends or friends of friends; it survives in only one complete and one partial manuscript copy, neither of them in Browne's handwriting.⁹ The second version, which can be assigned tentatively to the period 1638–1640, seems to have circulated much more widely. It survives in six manuscript copies,¹⁰ and the extent of its circulation can be inferred from the fact that none of these surviving copies is in Browne's handwriting, none is identical to another, and none even appears to have been derived from the same immediate source copy as any other. The pirated printed edition of 1642 appears to have used a now-lost manuscript copy from this stage as its source text.

Upon the publication of the unauthorized edition, Browne prepared the third and final version of the work, published in 1643 under his own name. But although, as we have seen, Browne dismisses the *Religio* as the work of his younger, greener years and insists that he would never have thought of publishing a new edition were it not for the corruptions that had crept into the work in the course of its manuscript transmission, it has long been known that Browne did *not*, as he claims, simply correct the errors “of that Peece which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously published before” (“To the Reader”). Rather than returning to a less corrupt authorial version, Browne took a copy of the 1642 printing, corruptions and all, as his copy text. He made a number of small changes and corrections in preparing his

⁹The complete manuscript copy is held by the library at Pembroke College, Oxford; the partial copy is at the British Library (Lansdowne 489). For the genealogy of these copies, see Denonain's discussion in the introduction to his 1953 edition of the *Religio*, ix–xxiv.

¹⁰According to Peter Beal, comp., *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 1625–1700, pt. 1, *Behn–King* (London and New York: Mansell, 1987), 15–16, the six surviving manuscript copies of the second edition are located at the following institutions: St. John's College, Cambridge (James 281); the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Rawlinson D 162); McGill University, Montreal (Osler 4417); Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (828.3 B884r); and the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, which holds two different copies (21267 and 21268).



The title page of the first printed edition of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (London: printed for Andrew Crooke, 1642). It is not known whether Browne himself gave his work this title, as none of the manuscript copies originally bore a title. Robert H. Taylor Collection, 17th-54, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

authorized edition, but he also inserted so much new text that the 1643 printing qualifies as an entirely separate version of the work.¹¹

One of the three copies of the 1642 *Religio* held by Princeton's Robert H. Taylor Collection (RHT 17th-56) provides a crucial link between the *Religio*'s second- and third-stage versions. It is a fragmentary copy, with annotations in Browne's handwriting that appear to have formed the basis for the revised printing of 1643. The copy, which has been disbound, begins on page 47 of what was originally a 190-page octavo volume. Eighty-eight of the pages contain annotations, some exceedingly minor (a change in verb tense, for example), but some of them quite extensive. At some point in the item's history, its pages were trimmed, partly cutting off the occasional word or phrase. Nevertheless, the changes are all sufficiently legible. What they show is an author only casually concerned with the textual errors or corruptions that he claims prompted this new printing, for a large number of erroneous readings remain in the 1643 edition. Instead, a surprising number of changes focus on particular kinds of religious issues.

The alterations that Browne made between the second and third versions of the *Religio* are generally similar in kind to those he made between the first and second versions; therefore, I will first explain the patterns that I see in the earlier set of changes. Based upon the large number of surviving manuscripts from this stage, I believe that Browne's first revision was in part a response to his work's reaching a wider audience than he had perhaps anticipated. Moreover, because some of the changes show greater hostility toward the reformist elements within the church (Browne alters one line so that he is criticizing "Presbyters" rather than "Prelates," for example), I have tentatively placed this revision in the period 1638–1640, the time of the Bishops War. Prompted by Charles I's efforts to remake the Scottish Kirk along Episcopalian lines, the Bishops War was immensely unpopular in England and strengthened the opposition of nonconformist Calvinists to what they regarded as the increasingly imperious English Church under the leadership of William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Browne, on the other hand—although no friend of

¹¹Jonathan F. S. Post has made a useful study of the additions Browne made in preparing the 1643 printing for the press, although he does not devote much time or consideration to Browne's *elisions*, and he appears not to have known about Princeton's annotated copy. See Jonathan F. S. Post, "Browne's Revisions of *Religio Medici*," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985), 145–63.

Laud—seems to have disliked the Puritans and Presbyterians even more. In the Bishops War, one can see writ small many of the issues that would lead within a few years to the English Civil War itself.

Many of the changes that Browne made at this stage reflect what I would argue was a deliberate effort to alter his authorial persona, and nowhere is this more true than in the passages that deal with certain controversial religious subjects. One of the most striking examples comes in Browne's treatment of heresy. In the *Religio's* first version, Browne enters into this subject early on, in what would eventually become sections 6 and 7. At the end of section 6, Browne explains that he always "follow[s] the great wheele of the church" in order to "leave noe gapp to heresies, scismes or errorrs, of which at this present I shall not injure truth to say, I have noe taint, or tincture" (Pembroke 1.6).¹² However, he adds, "I must confesse my greener studies have beene polluted with 2 or 3, not anie begot in these later Centuries, but old, & obsolete, such as could never have infected anie, but such an extravagant head as mine" (Pembroke 1.6).

Browne then enumerates these "old and obsolete" heresies: his first "was that errorr of the Arabians, that the soules of men perished with their bodies, but should both bee raised againe at the Last Day" (a belief more properly known as mortalism); his second, "that of the Origenists or Chiliasts, that God would not allwaies persist in his vengeance, but after a definite terme of his wrath hee would release the damned soules from torture"; and his final one, a belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead (Pembroke 1.7). Almost immediately after identifying and explaining how he fell into these heresies, Browne seems to change his mind, claiming that they were not actually *true* heresies, because he never tried to coax anyone else into them and indeed never even told anyone about his beliefs—and so eventually they went out on their own for lack of new fuel to feed upon. "Therefore," Browne concludes, "these opinions though condemned by Law, were not heresies in mee but bare errorrs, & single lapses of my understanding without a joint depravity of my will" (Pembroke 1.7).

Even in the earliest version of the *Religio* this assertion rings false,

¹² For quotations from the first version of the *Religio*, I rely on my transcription of the manuscript held by Pembroke College. For the reader's ease of reference, however, I identify these quotations not by their original section numbers, but rather by the part and section numbers from the final version that have since become standard.

especially given that none of the heresies Browne mentions actually *was* “obsolete” in the seventeenth century (although all were indeed old), and most were quite popular, especially in centers of humanist learning such as Padua. Any suspicion that Browne might be protesting too much in this passage, and that he is really more anxious about these heresies than he seems, should be heightened upon comparing this passage with the one that appears in the second-stage version of the *Religio*. In his revision, Browne adds a considerable amount of text to his discussion of heresy, but this new text serves to dilute rather than amplify the original. Whereas in the first version Browne ends one section with the claim that his heresies are old and obsolete and “could never have infected anie, but such an extravagant head as mine” (Pembroke 1.6), and then immediately begins the next section with a catalog of those heresies, in the second version he inserts, after the above sentence, a lengthy and very general reflection on how “Heresies perish not with their Authors, but, like the river *Arethusa*, though they lose their currents in one place, they rise up againe in another” (1.6). Browne takes several long sentences to reflect on the ways in which ideas disappear and reappear before he returns, in what seems only the most leisurely fashion, to the subject of his own heresies. He follows the same pattern at the end of the original passage as well: immediately after denying that his beliefs are heresies, he adds a discussion of “the villany of the first schisme of *Lucifer*, who”—unlike Browne—“was not content to erre alone, but drew into his faction many Legions of Spirits” (1.6). Whatever else these new passages do, they interrupt the original momentum of Browne’s treatment of his heresies, burying the autobiographical significance of the subject under more tangential speculations. Amid the embellishments, Browne’s own heresies are easily overlooked; they seem, in fact, like mere illustrations of a larger point about the nature of heresy—when in fact, in the original work, they *were* the point.

Although these passages are the only part of the *Religio* that confronts the issue of heresy directly, there are hints throughout all three versions that Browne was at some point strongly attracted to at least one additional heresy: antitrinitarianism. This heresy was a particularly resilient one throughout the Renaissance and Reformation, perhaps because the scriptural evidence for a tripartite God is rather scanty, and the evidence for a co-equal, co-eternal tripartite God almost nonexistent. As more people began to read the Bible for them-

selves, the nature of the godhead inevitably came in for questioning. Further, like mortalism, antitrinitarianism was a heresy notably tied to the University of Padua.¹³ Shortly after the sections in which he discusses his heresies, Browne comments, “There is noe attribute [of God] adds more difficulty than the misterie of the trinity; where though in a relative way of father & son, wee must denie a priority” (Pembroke I.12). Although he then goes on to attempt to unravel this mystery, he only ties himself in knots. In the entire first version of the *Religio*, Browne mentions the Holy Ghost only once, in passing; he seems largely uninterested in Jesus; and he immediately discounts the only scriptural passage that he produces as possible evidence for the Trinity.¹⁴

The changes that Browne made between the *Religio*'s second version and the version that would become the 1643 printing follow some of the same patterns; indeed, the discussion of heresies that I analyzed above gets yet *another* addition in 1643 that moves the passage still further from the realm of autobiography. If it is the case that Browne's second-stage revisions were motivated by concerns about how his orthodoxy would be read by a larger audience and within the more politically charged circumstances of the Bishops War, then both Browne's revisions and his motives may have been quite similar in 1642 and 1643, when he prepared his authorized printed edition. The published version would, of course, reach a still wider audience than any manuscript version, and the tensions of the Civil War, even more than those of the Bishops War, might well have inspired Browne toward even more circumspection in his treatment of controversial religious issues.

The very first substantive change in the fragmentary copy that Princeton holds illustrates Browne's continuing concern with the

¹³Notable proponents of antitrinitarianism with some connection to Padua include Michael Servetus (1509–1553), the antitrinitarian Catholic whom Calvin eventually had burned at the stake in Geneva, and both Laelius Socinus and his nephew Faustus Socinus, who studied in Padua off and on throughout the 1540s, 1550s, and 1560s and whose beliefs would develop into Socinianism. See, for example, George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 567–70, 621, 630–35.

¹⁴For Browne's discussion of the Holy Ghost, see section 1.20. In the second-stage revision of the *Religio*, Browne added an entirely new section, 1.32, which contains a second discussion of the Holy Ghost. For Browne's remarks on the Trinity, see 1.22.

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it, and as weakly that the world was eternall; that dispute much troubled the penne of the antient Philosophers, but *Moses* decided that question, and salvd all with a new terme of creation; a production of something out of nothing; ~~and that is whatsoever~~ *& what is it?* is opposite to something, more exactly, that which is truly contrary unto God, for hee onely is, all other have an existence, with depending, and are something but by distinction. *& herein is divinity conformant unto philosophy. & generation*

The whole Creation is a mystery, and particularly that of man; at the blast of his mouth were the rest of the creatures made, and at his bare word they started out of nothing: but in the frame of man (as the text describes it) he played the sensible operator, and seemed not so much to create, as make him, when he had separated the materials of other creatures, there

F 3 conse-

One of Browne's lengthier emendations, discussing the creation. It begins, "& wherein is divinity conformant unto philosophy." Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London: printed for Andrew Crooke, 1642), 85. Robert H. Taylor Collection, 17th-56, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

same subjects—the Trinity, the nature of the soul, the afterlife—that appear to have inspired many of his earlier revisions. After the sentence, "Whether *Eve* was framed out of the left side of *Adam*, I dispute not; because I stand not yet assured which is the right side of a man, or whether there be such distinction in Nature," Browne adds, in the margin of his copy of the 1642 printing, "y^t she was ed[i]fied [out] of y^e [ribe] of Ada[m] I belee[ve] yet ray[se] no que[s]tion [who]

gree; I was borne in the eighth Climate, but seemed forty ^{to be} framed, and constellated unto all; I am no Plant that will not prosper out of a Garden. All places, all ages, makes unto me one Country; I am in *England*, every where, and under any meridian; I have beene shipwrackt, yet am not enemy with the sea or winds; I can study, play, or sleepe in a tempest. In brieft, I am averse from nothing, neither Plant, Animall, nor Spirit; my Conscience would give me the lye, if I should say I absolutely detest, or hate, the Devill, or at least abhorre ~~him~~, but that we ^{may} ~~must~~ ^{be} come to composition. ^{any} ~~Is~~ ^{there} any ^{thing} among those common objects of hatred, that I can safely, I doe contemne and laugh at. ^{That} ~~That~~ ^{great} ~~in~~ ^{en} ~~quiry~~ ^{en} of reason, vertue, and Religion, the multitude, that numerous piece of Monstrousity, which taken alynder, seemes ^{the} ~~the~~ reasonable Creatures of God; but confused together, make

This emendation shows Browne's changed attitude toward the devil. The original suggests that Browne hates nothing, not even the devil, whereas the revised version claims that the *only* thing he truly hates is the devil. Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London: printed for Andrew Crooke, 1642), 137. Robert H. Taylor Collection, 17th-56, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

shall arise [with] y^t ribe [at] y^e Res[ur]rection]" (1.21).¹⁵ This addition allows Browne to moderate a rather flip statement with an assertion of his orthodoxy, but it also shows his continuing preoccupation with the resurrection of the body—precisely the subject of one of the supposedly “old and obsolete” heresies he mentions above. Other

¹⁵ RTH 17th-56, p. 49.

annotations show a similar pattern. Discussing Noah's Ark, Browne initially wrote, "How all the kinds of Creatures, not onely in their owne bulks, but with a competency of food and sustenance, might be preserved in one Ark, and with the extent of three hundred cubits, to a reason that rightly examines it, will appeare very difficult" (1.22). On his annotated copy (and in the 1643 printing), however, Browne replaces "difficult" with "foesible"—moving, once again, to the safer side of speculations that he might have felt were too dangerous, or at least too irreverent, in the charged religious climate of the 1640s. Browne likewise deletes or emends statements that touch on the Trinity or the nature of the soul. Whereas in the 1642 printing, for example, Browne wrote, "in the braine, which we tearme the seate of reason, there is not any thing of moment more then I can discover in the cranie of a beast," in his revision he adds, "[&] this is a sensible & no inconsiderable argument of the inorganicity of the soule, at least in that sense we usually so receive it" (1.36).¹⁶

Other changes seem to reflect a more general cautiousness. Browne inserts a number of qualifiers, apparently in order to moderate statements that he may have felt sounded, in their original form, dangerously definitive. In yet another discussion of the nature of the soul, for example, Browne emends a statement that begins, "nor truly can I reasonably deny, that the soule in this her sublunary estate, is wholly inorganicall," so that it reads instead, "nor truly can I preempt[o]rily deny, that the soule in this her sublunary estate, is wholly & in all ac[t]ions inorganicall" (1.36).¹⁷ Here Browne has both softened and nearly reversed his meaning. In the 1642 printing Browne says, in effect, that he believes the soul to be inorganic; in the revision he says that he cannot say for *sure* that it is *not* inorganic. In adding, "in all actions," he further moderates his claim: if the soul *is* organic, it may be thus only in certain actions.

Princeton's annotated copy of the 1642 *Religio* indicates some of the issues of concern to Browne as he prepared his revised version for the press—but scholars could learn as much simply by comparing the 1642 and 1643 printings. What the annotated copy tells us that a simple comparison of the printed versions cannot is how Browne's revision process occurred. The annotations, first of all, are extremely neat, especially for a man notorious for his sprawling handwriting,

¹⁶ RTH 17th-56, p. 87.

¹⁷ RTH 17th-56, p. 88.

and the Princeton copy contains no manuscript corrections or additions that are not also present in the 1643 printing. This suggests that the item Princeton holds quite likely does not represent the *first* set of revisions that Browne made to the work, although it may well be the copy that Browne conveyed to the printer. If so, there must have been additional sheets of paper interleaved, for eight very long additions—some of which became entirely new sections—are not, for reason of length, present in the margins of the 1642 copy. Instead, Browne indicates the location of these insertions with long diagonal slash marks in the margin of the 1642 edition; if these insertions are still extant, they no longer accompany the Princeton annotations.

Whether or not the changes reflected on the Princeton copy (and in whatever loose sheets are now lost) were Browne's first emendations, we know that they were not the last: eleven additional emendations are present in the 1643 printing that are *not* reflected in Browne's 1642 annotations. All of these additional changes are minor, most amounting to only a word or two—the longest is a five-word phrase—and most do no more than slightly moderate Browne's statements. Possibly Browne wrote out an additional set of changes on another copy of the 1642 *Religio*, which then became the copy text for the 1643 printing, or possibly he made the additional changes while the book was actually in press. I incline to the latter view, but it is impossible to say.

What the Princeton copy demonstrates is that Browne carefully oversaw the publication of the *Religio*, but that, contrary to what his 1643 preface implies, he did not concern himself in any systematic way with the correcting of errors. This approach to the task, combined with the nature of the changes he does make, suggests that, if he was indeed chagrined at the work's earlier, ostensibly unauthorized publication, it may have had less to do with his embarrassment over the juvenile nature of the *Religio* or any belief in the "stigma of print" than with his concern that he was revealing too much of himself, laying himself open for too much criticism about issues on which he himself had long felt uneasy and where he knew himself to be particularly vulnerable. From my examination of the three different versions of the *Religio Medici*, I believe that Browne initially wrote the work not to give voice to a naturally relaxed and tolerant approach to religion, but rather out of very real and immediate anxiety about a number of possibly heretical beliefs that he appears to have encoun-

tered in the European cities where he received his medical training. Along the way, and especially as the religious climate in England grew more divisive, Browne does appear to have grown fonder of the English Church, and he may have seen the potential for his work to promote a version of that religion that could stand in contrast to the Calvinist or Laudian extremes then in the ascendancy. However, his later works suggest that Browne may never fully have abandoned his heterodox ideas or brought his personal beliefs into perfect alignment with those of his church; he may simply have stopped discussing them in print.¹⁸

¹⁸Browne discusses the possible mortality of the soul in letters to his sons and others. There is also an unpublished manuscript in the British Library (MS Sloane 1879, ff. 1–57), apparently composed when Browne was in his sixties or seventies, in which he returns to speculations very much like those in the *Religio Medici*.