The Paston Treasure was commissioned by Sir Robert Paston, politician, founder member of the Royal Society and would-be alchemical virtuoso. It commemorates some of his family's collection as it was about to be dispersed. My interests are in the artists' materials (viewed from an early modern perspective) and the materials it depicts (viewed from a post-colonialist standpoint).

I am at Stanford to research this painting but have yet to write anything about it that is in a fit state to share. I therefore attach the draft of a paper (a work in progress) about another early modern painting (a portrait of John Donne) which, although very different in subject matter, I hope demonstrates my approach.
Fig. 1  Anon., *John Donne*, c. 1595
National Portrait Gallery, London
John Donne’s melancholic portrait

This paper is about a painted pun in a portrait of John Donne. Any joke that calls for explanation can be said to have failed, yet failure in this case says little about any shortfall in Donne’s undoubted wit and is instead more a measure of the distance between his mental world and our own.

John Donne commissioned a number of portraits. The first was painted in 1591, when he was nineteen years old, and is known only through an engraving in the 1635 edition of Donne’s Poems.¹ Its painter is unknown but it has been suggested that the original may have been by Nicholas Hilliard, mainly on the strength of Donne’s reference to Hilliard in The Storme.² The second, of about 1595 and again by an unknown painter, is the focus of this paper. (Fig.1) The poet’s third portrait was painted by Isaac Oliver in 1616. It too was engraved and it appeared in the 1640 edition of Donne’s LXXX Sermons.³ A fourth, of 1620, by an unknown painter, is in a very unusual format that relates to classical medallion portraits. It was engraved and was published in the 1651 edition of Donne’s Letters.⁴ The last, lost, portrait was painted in 1631 but its uppermost portion is known through an engraving in Death’s Duel of 1632.⁵ The whole painting served as an approximate model for Nicholas Stone’s 1632 funeral monument for Donne in St Paul’s Cathedral, where he had served as Dean for the last ten years of his life.

It has been rightly said that, with the exception of the Oliver miniature, all these images are ‘out of line with the ordinary portraits of the time, and have a marked element of role-playing’.⁶ This is most evident in the extraordinary final portrait, the genesis of which was reported by Donne’s biographer, Izaak Walton. His account has been questioned,⁷ but according to him, Donne rose naked from his death bed, wrapped himself in a shroud — which was knotted at his head, allowing his face to show — and stood on an urn facing east ‘from whence he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus’. He posed for an un-named ‘choice Painter’ who drew him on a full-length board. Donne kept this portrait in his bedroom, where it became his ‘hourly object till his death.’⁸ This suggests a serious side to Donne’s ‘role-playing’, as the portrait and its subsequent contemplation are completely consistent with the tradition of Ars Moriendi.⁹ (Fig. 2)

The subject of this paper, John Donne’s 1595 portrait, also involves considerable role-playing. In it, Donne chose to be depicted as a lover, described by a contemporary as ‘in a melancholic posture’.¹⁰ Thomas Morton reported having seen the picture in ‘a dear friend’s chamber in Lincoln’s Inn all enveloped in a darkish shadow’.¹¹ Donne was admitted to Lincoln’s Inn in 1592, a few years before the portrait was painted, and the ‘dear friend’ to whom Morton referred was probably Christopher Brooke. Donne and Brooke can be linked by their time together at Lincoln’s Inn and through the poet’s verse letters ‘To Mr C. B.’. It is possible that Donne may have been trying to woo Brooke’s sister and, if so, his pursuit was apparently unsuccessful since the letter complains;

¹Yet love’s hot fires, which martyr my sad minde,
Doe send forth scalding sighes, which have the Art
To melt all ice, but that which walls her heart.¹²
The portrait was returned to the poet, presumably upon Brooke's death, and it remained in Donne's possession until his own death in 1631.

The poet's influence

The main influence over the production of a portrait is the patron's choice of painter. For some of his portraits, Donne chose recognised portrait painters and for others, unknown painters. Whilst there is a modern tendency to categorise both artists and their output, it must be remembered that there was a fluid migration of practitioners and imagery in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century visual arts. For example, Marcus Gheeraerts, an artist usually associated with portraits of the nobility, also painted images as diverse as blacksmiths and chameleons, and his images found use in fine art, in the illustrations of fables, scientific texts and emblems.\textsuperscript{13} Herd of painters also often painted portraits.\textsuperscript{14}

Donne's second portrait was recently restored at the Hamilton Kerr Institute, Cambridge, during which time it was subjected to close examination by conservators and art historians. Those examinations concluded that the painting was not the work of any recognised portrait painter. This may be significant since choosing a painter whose normal work did not include portraits and whose name was not worth recording may have allowed the poet to exert a greater influence over his manner of depiction. In wishing to control the painting process, Donne would have been a following the example of a close friend and fellow (but neglected) 'metaphysical' poet, Lord Herbert of Cherbury.\textsuperscript{15} Herbert commissioned several portraits that appear to have been composed to his own programme in the first coordinated attempt by a poet to manipulate his painted image.\textsuperscript{16}

A poet's primary medium is words, and this painting contains the inscription 'ILLUMINA TENEBR[AS] NOSTRAS DOMINAE' or 'Lighten my darkness, Lady'. The 'Lady' in question could conceivably be Our Lady, and the painting's darkness could be in keeping with Donne's recurring interest in death and the portrait's funereal gloom. However, a reference to the Virgin may have been politically ill-advised for an ambitious Elizabethan, given the fate of his brother who died in prison for harbouring a Jesuit a few years earlier. The inscription is now widely accepted to be an irreverent, if not blasphemous, parody of the third Collect for Evening Prayer 'Lighten our darkness, our Lord'. The Lady may therefore refer to a lover and the gloom may express Donne's melancholy at her absence. The Lady may even be Christopher Brooke's sister, the object of his unrequited love. Whatever the Lady's identity, the inscription itself was, without doubt, determined by the sitter, not the painter.

The presence of carefully chosen inscriptions on Elizabethan portraits is very common and indicates the interactive nature of the commission. It also reflects the close relationship between painting and poetry. The Roman lyric poet Horace had a profound influence on English Renaissance portraiture which was informed by his simile \textit{ut picture poesis}, 'as is poetry, so is painting'.\textsuperscript{17} Contemporary art theorists could invert the relationship; 'as is painting, so is poetry'.\textsuperscript{18} Poetry and painting were sisters and, according to Lomazzo in an artist's manual translated into English in 1595, even twins.\textsuperscript{19} Pictures were thus silent poems as poems were spoken pictures.\textsuperscript{20}
Yet pictures were generally considered inferior to poems and, in the hierarchy of visual arts, portraiture was inferior to history painting, as Donne’s reference to a Hilliard-drawn ‘hand or eye’ makes clear.\(^{21}\) Since the most valued part of any painting was its poetic aspect, it is worth considering the relationship between Donne’s portrait and his poetry. Whilst the young Donne devoted himself to ‘spoken painting’, his forays into commissioning and stage-managing ‘silent poetry’ indicate an interest in the visual arts, reinforced by his later statements that sight was the ‘noblest of the senses’.\(^{22}\) Many of his poems and letters contain references to the portrayal of faces; his own and other’s, whether engraved ‘in my heart’,\(^{23}\) ‘drowned in a transparent tear’,\(^{24}\) or conventionally painted.\(^{25}\) If painting informed Donne’s poetry, then I would suggest that Donne’s poetry also informed this portrait, above and beyond the inclusion of an inscription.

Since the continental Horatian aesthetic grafted so successfully onto the indigenous English painting tradition, words and images were compared more than contrasted in Elizabethan art. True to that aesthetic, Donne’s portrait contains visual effects that parallel some of the verbal effects – like puns – that he employed in his poetry. For example, his shirt is undone, reflecting the state of a soul ‘undone’ by separation from his lady. This particular painted detail visually fore-shadows a three-line poem that he allegedly wrote about five years later aged around twenty-nine, upon his politically injudicious marriage to Anne, his employer’s seventeen-year-old daughter.

\[
\text{‘John Donne,} \\
\text{Anne Donne,} \\
\text{Undone.}^{26}
\]

But Donne enjoyed more puns in his picture. The inner garment, of which only one sleeve is visible, is dull-brown in colour. In contemporary terminology, this sleeve was ‘dunne’ coloured. (This colour-term, via ‘dynne’, accounts for the modern adjective ‘dingy’, so the dinginess of the whole painting alludes to the sitter’s name.)\(^{27}\) Donne’s poetry was littered with puns, so the dingy portrait’s dun sleeve and undone shirt most probably owe more to the sitter’s direction than to the unknown painter’s discretion.\(^{28}\)

Puns play upon the fact that similar or identical-sounding words can mean very different things. Unlike Shakespeare, Donne rarely coined new words and his technically complex poetry relied heavily on the polysemic nature of everyday words. His word-play was widely appreciated because it was in accord with the English renaissance’s deep engagement with etymology, including Plato’s \textit{Cratylus} and \textit{onomantia}, or divine names.\(^{29}\) For Donne, the origins of words were not arbitrary and if one word had several meanings, then the punning possibilities it offered were potentially meaningful, enabling him to extend or connect semantic fields for witty or rhetorical effect. However, as Donne’s final shroud portrait - not to mention his whole poetic oeuvre - makes clear, his jests could be deadly serious.

Puns concisely embody the semantic reverberance of disparate entities brought into unexpected unison and, so doing, radically disrupt the flow of reading (or listening, if we consider poems as spoken paintings). Puns are affective and, as has been said of Marvell’s poetry, ‘affective experiences ... can be exploited to gain, without readers’
awareness of the goal, intuitions usually called philosophical." The same might be said of paintings. In Donne's poems, the semantic connections forged by puns helped bind the parts into a whole, a whole whose philosophical and spiritual significance has been rightly recognised in the epithet, 'metaphysical'. His use of puns was an extension of the fact that, even when used in all seriousness, words have multiple meaning as, for example, 'sol' which could refer to both 'gold' and 'sun'.

Whilst Donne's poetry was full of often abstruse references it was nonetheless part of a popular literary tradition in which it was sometimes obvious what was meant and sometimes left up to the audience to discover what may have been meant. Yet how did Donne convert verbal play in his poems into visual play in his portrait?

The reception of portraiture in contemporary France indicates that scholarly and aristocratic audiences formed a consensus on the importance of accurate physiognomy whereas popular audiences retained the medieval values of a memorable fantasy. Thus, 'two representational paradigms ... existed for much of the sixteenth century' in French portraiture. Donne's portrait seems to display accurate physiognomy. This paper will suggest that his portrait also employs the second, more popular, representational paradigm. Memorable fantasy was widespread in the medieval heraldic rebus, or visual pun on names, and Donne's word-play with clothes and colours follows in the same vein. Yet puns could be further extended into the material realm by harnessing the multivalent nature of matter in general and of pigments in particular. For such puns to have any affect, of course, one would have to assume a relatively widespread knowledge of pigments amongst those viewing the portrait. Such a supposition is supported by the fact pigments were often brought in apothecaries as they also had everyday use as cosmetics and medicines. One framework that gave them a deeper meaning was alchemy.

Alchemy

The British Library houses a set of connected manuscripts (probably dated between 1580 and 1591) that includes allegorical programmes for paintings and medical-alchemical texts. They were written by an unknown scholar for an unknown painter (possibly Cornelis Ketel) and they demonstrate a detailed technical knowledge of alchemy and pigments. Whilst these manuscripts related to large pictorial schemes, not intimate portraiture, they demonstrate a theoretical connection between alchemy, pigments and visual allegory. Alchemy and pigments were also connected in practice because the synthesis and purification of some artists' materials was undertaken either by alchemists or by artists themselves who used equipment and procedures that were understood as alchemical. Alchemy and pigments were also connected poetically, because both alchemy and painting involve transformation. This trope is enduring, and occurs for example in a late-twentieth-century description of the late-sixteenth-century painter's craft which involved

'a constantly surprising alchemy of art in which mundane materials, sometimes earthy - clay and mineral pigments, sometimes waste products - glovers' shreds, urine and ear-wax, sometimes familiar kitchen stock - vinegar, garlic and breadcrumbs, are transmuted with great labour and cunning into things of beauty and delight.'
As a metaphysical poet, John Donne was fully aware of a late-sixteenth-century variation on this trope - the tradition of alchemy in the spiritual transformation of the soul. Numerous commentators have noted Donne's use of alchemical imagery in his poems (as well as in his later sermons) and it has been said that whenever he used alchemical language, he did so 'with the seriousness and precision of the alchemists themselves'.

Some artists' materials were actually made by alchemy but, as vestiges of God, all matter, even the most lowly, carried significance. Within the Elizabethan world everything was part of an intelligible and harmonious cosmos. As Gombrich noted, in such a universe, anything, as a visible symbol, was

'linked through the network of correspondences and sympathies with the supra-celestial essence which it embodies, it is only consistent to expect it to partake not only of the “meaning” and “effect” of what it represents but to become interchangeable with it.'

Such a Neo-Platonic approach to all things in the world was 'the common property of every third-rate mind of the age.' And John Donne was far from being a third-rate mind - he was the son of an ironmonger, brought up by a physician step-father and educated at Oxford, Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn. His metaphysical poetry hangs from a vast Neo-Platonic structure in which some links in 'the network of correspondences and sympathies' were puns. Indeed, that same Neo-Platonic structure also connected the two 'sols'; the alchemists' gold and the astrologers' sun.

Donne's complete mastery of the Elizabethan world view is evident in all his writings and he knew how that world view could be connected to the technicalities of the visual arts. As a fashionable young man about town, he had an intimate interest in the arts. He used the word 'painting' as a verb as well as a noun and he appreciated that the process could have greater value than the product; '... like painters that do take Delight, not in made work, but whiles they make.' His poetry also used detailed metaphors drawn from craft knowledge including the use of paint to counterfeit gems in gold settings; '... like lying stones in saffron'd tin.' In another poem about unrequited love, he described the objects of his affections in rather chilling terms, comparing them to an exotic material that sometimes found its way on to artists' palettes; '... they are but Mummy, possessed.' He was evidently well-versed in the techniques of visual art as befitted a late sixteenth-century gentleman of culture and learning.

Artists' materials

John Donne's portrait is in oil on an oak panel. The pigment that provided him with an opportunity for material - in addition to verbal and visual - punning was lead white. It could be seen as both an alchemical material, in the eyes of Cennino Cennini, and as an everyday material, in the eyes of John Smith (who recommended scraping it off the roofs of old buildings). Lead white's history, usage, properties and occurrence are widely known, indeed it is practically ubiquitous in the European easel painting tradition. Lead white was a completely appropriate pigment to use in this portrait because, as a contemporary treatise said, whilst Spanish white and alabaster were best in gum, white lead and ceruse were best in oil.
Its ubiquity and suitability means that there can be no suggestion that lead white was specially chosen for any punning potential in the portrait. (An idiosyncratic choice of pigment would be the material equivalent of coining a novel word and, as has been noted, most of John Donne’s poetic punning involved everyday words.) However, at the end of the sixteenth century, the material content of a work of art was a potentially contentious issue since art’s materiality was closely related to the problems of idolatry. For the son and brother of a Catholic in a Protestant country, Donne’s awareness of artists’ materials could therefore even have been coloured by theological and political concerns. Indeed, around the sixteenth-century iconoclasm, numerous polemic pamphlets circulated discussing relationships between depictions and the materials in which they were depicted. For example, saints were flesh-and-blood, so stone saints were potentially idolatrous and seventeenth-century painters - including Maarten van Heemskerck, Maarten de Vos and Peter Paul Rubens - commented on the issue in oil.55

Like any artists’ material, the identity of lead white was therefore potentially significant and the pigment’s ubiquity did not necessarily preclude a special meaning in any particular context. Indeed, Donne took great pleasure in celebrating the metaphysical significance of the everyday, the overlooked and the apparently meaningless. For example, when his girlfriend caught and killed a flea that had bitten them both, he used the event as an opportunity to celebrate the symbolic mingling of their vital fluids; ‘... with one blood made of two’.56 Such attention to a prosaic detail suggests that a mere pigment might not have been beneath the poet’s gaze.

Lead white was made by exposing sheets of (black)57 lead metal to acidic fumes, typically by leaving it for a month under a pile of horse dung. It would not have been lost on the poet that this apparently filthiest of procedures paradoxically made the purest of colours.58 White engendered from black and purity emerging from filth could be seen as expressions of what Gombrich called the ‘network of correspondences and sympathies’ with the ‘celestial essence’ which the Elizabethan world saw embodied in the metal lead. Through alchemy, all metals were related to heavenly bodies (as the gold-sol was to the sun-sol) and the particular ‘celestial essence’ embodied within lead was that of the planet Saturn.59

The ‘network of correspondences and sympathies’ associated with this Saturnine artists’ material included the Janus-like nature of its production. Poetically, the white pigment could be described as a pearl from a dungheap.60 As such, it shared its origins with that other ‘pearl from a dungheap’, saltpetre, also known as ‘the mother of gunpowder’, which was extracted from beneath dovecots, around stables and other dung-rich earths. The Elizabethan state’s search for saltpetre ran rough-shod over the rights of the individual so dung’s potential for riches were a politically fraught and contentious issue.61 Contemporary playwrights used dung’s properties as grist to their mill and Donne - son of an ironmonger, brought up by a physician and educated at Oxford - would certainly have known, and appreciated, the details of lead white’s production from dung.62 The genesis of this artists’ material was pregnant with meanings, including the ideas of creation out of putrefaction and light emerging from the darkness of the grave. It was an excellent material example of the riddles of inversion that Donne explored in numerous poems, including, for example;
Hence is't, that I am carried towards the West
This day, when my Soul's form bends towards the East.
There I should see a Sun, by rising set,
And by that setting endless day beget'.

Yet lead white, like all matter, is polysemic. And the opportunity for material punning in this particular portrait of John Donne, rests not on lead's relationship with Saturn - and thereby with the double nature and apparent inversions of Janus - but with the metal and planet's joint relationship with melancholy.

Melancholy

Melancholy was one of the four fundamental humours – ‘sanguine’ or hot and wet, associated with the element air; ‘choleric’ or hot and dry, associated with fire; ‘phlegmatic’ or cold and wet, associated with water; and ‘melancholic’ or cold and dry, associated with earth. All four humours were present in everybody (and every thing). When they were in perfect balance, the individual was healthy, and when they became imbalanced, the individual became diseased. Those individuals dominated by a sanguine temperament were fleshy, ruddy, amiable and courageous whilst choleric people were lean, hairy, proud and shrewd. Phlegmatics, on the other hand, were short, pale, slothful and dull. Melancholics were dry, dark, obstinate and surly with a 'certain slow pace and soft nice gait, holding down their heads, with countenance and look grim and frowning.' Melancholy was a medical condition of body and soul.

Imbalances in the humours could arise due to lifestyle, diet or natural cycles. Melancholy, for example, could be associated with the end of cycles such as old age or autumn or, possibly in Donne's case, the end of a relationship. There was much contemporary debate about topical causes of melancholy; the effect of Protestantism, social factors and fear of invasion by the Spanish were all proposed. The new emergent experimental science was also a candidate, as Donne himself said, 'And new Philosophy calls all in doubt ... this world's spent ... Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone'. However, some of the assumed causes of melancholy were universal, such as the astrological influence of the planet Saturn. And according to official Bills of Mortality well into the eighteenth century, it was even possible to be fatally 'planet-struck'.

Melancholy was a physical state yet many of its causes and effects were psychological. Sorrow was the 'mother and daughter of melancholy, her epitome, symptom and chief cause.' Via the concept of 'hypochondria', melancholy became popularly associated with what is now called depression although Donne would have seen it as a temporary humoral imbalance or an external quality that could provoke a temporary imbalance. In other words, melancholy could be a passing state or something that induced that state in everyday life. However, if extreme or chronic, melancholy had the potential to become pathological and require treatment with changes in lifestyle or diet, or access to psychoactive agents such as lapis lazuli, the mere sight of which was said to dispel melancholy. This was in accordance with the artist, Lomazzo's assertion that 'colours have different qualities, therefore they cause diverse effects in the beholders ...(as Aristotle teacheth)'.
Lapis lazuli was available in apothecaries as a medicine and it was also ground-up as an artists' pigment. It should come as no surprise that the blue colour was not found during the analysis of Donne's portrait. According to contemporary medical theory, its presence in a painting that indulged in melancholy would have been counterproductive.

The combination of lovesickness, melancholy and alchemy, as well as puns, had been the stuff of poetry for centuries. By the fourth quarter of the sixteenth century, the affectation of love-sick melancholy had become extremely fashionable, especially among Donne and his peers - young male aristocrats, recently returned from travels. One reason for this vogue was the association between melancholy and genius, which made artists - and those wishing to be seen as sensitive to the arts - claim melancholia as a birthright. Donne's melancholy pervades his writing and in a later imagined duel with death he asked,

'... what have I done, either to breed or breathe these vapours? They tell me it is my melancholy. Did I infuse, did I drink in melancholy into myself? ... I have done nothing ... yet must suffer in it, die by it.'

Yet even here, as scholars have noted, he could not resist punning on his name.

A material pun

The stage has now been set to consider the portrait's material pun. The particular type of melancholy that the role-playing Donne channelled for this portrait was known as 'inamorato', the condition of being in love that was often portrayed as a sickness. The frontispiece of Burton's treatise on anatomy shows a young man in the throws of lovesickness, surrounded by discarded books, quills, music and instruments. He wears a large wide-brimmed hat, his face is down-cast and his arms are crossed, just like Donne in his portrait. (Fig. 3)

The pigment lead white is present in the portrait's lace collar, the shirt's drawstring, as well as, of course, in the pale flesh paint. There it plays more or less utilitarian roles in providing the appropriate colours. Yet the portrait features another use of lead white which, I suggest, is specifically connected to lovesickness. Love, as we all know, is caused by Cupid's arrows. In the circumstances surrounding this portrait - as hinted by the inscription - Donne's love was not reciprocated, and he would have known the exact nature of the arrow with which he had been smitten. Cupid used two types of arrow. One type had a tip of gold and the consequence of being hit by these was true love, as Shakespeare implied in a play written around the time Donne's portrait was being painted. The other type had a tip of lead and the consequence of being hit by these, according to Ovid, was unrequited love.

Donne's humoursal imbalance was caused by Cupid's leaden arrow. Donne felt a connection with a Lady who was impervious to his charms and who, according to the inscription, had cast him into darkness, the colour of lead. Donne's hope was to be alchemically lightened by his Lady, just as dark lead was lightened by its humiliation under dung. He wished to re-connect with his Lady via his tormented soul. Or, more accurately, he wished that his love would become requited so that they would
automatically become connected via their two out-stretched and entwined souls. In his poetry he described the ecstatic connection between lovers as a;

"... dialogue of one ...
Our souls (which to advance their state,
Were gone out) hung 'twixt her, and me."

In another poem bemoaning the necessary parting of lovers (and incidentally, using terms that relate to the production of gilded paintings) he describes the continued connection, via souls 'gone out', between people whose bodies are at a distance;

"Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to aery thinness beat"

In the portrait, John Donne's melancholy soul is a thin whisper that emerges from his undone shirt, rises to his throat and then, to aery thinness beat, becomes an invisible thread that could, poetically, be imagined to reach-out beyond the picture frame to the one he loved. (Fig. 4)

There is absolutely no doubt that the thin whisper of lead white paint is intentional and original. During cleaning in 2011-12, the painting was examined by X-ray and stereomicroscope and inferences prompted by these observations were reinforced by the various paint layers' responses to solvents. The whisper does not represent the faint hint of some earlier composition, nor is it the result of some later restorer's interventions. Lead white in oil is the most durable of paints and, unlike some of the more vulnerable passages - such as those of carbon black in oil - it has survived the attentions of a number of restoration campaigns over the centuries.

Since the painting was cleaned, this thin whisper of white has been treated in the literature as an intentional and original part of the portrait and related to melancholy. Nick Davis associated the white whisper to the 'vapours' mentioned by John Donne (see ref 71, above) and thereby to 'scholarly', rather than 'erotic', melancholy. However, the quote comes from Devotions upon Emergent Occasions which was written some 30 years after the portrait was painted whereas the poems cited above, about lovers' entwined souls, are more or less contemporaneous with the painting.

Whether the whisper represents a scholar's melancholy-inducing vapour or a yearning lover's soul, it is, to the best of my knowledge, unique in Elizabethan painting. It would certainly not have been in the everyday repertoire of the unknown painter. Yet, as the above few lines of poetry suggest, the idea of diaphanous extended souls was comfortably within the sitter's repertoire. His melancholy soul (or even vapour) could have been depicted with a number of pigments and carbon black, for example, might have resonated visually with the idea of melancholy, or 'black choler'. However, John Donne chose lead white. His material pun involved having his Saturnine soul painted with a Saturnine pigment.

This pigment's punning resonance does not, of course, imply that lead white's connections with melancholy necessarily have any relevance whatsoever in other
painted contexts. After all, it is entirely possible - in fact, it is quite usual - to employ the words 'done' or 'undone' without evoking an Elizabethan metaphysical poet. Whether intended or not, puns depend on sometimes arcane cultural connections between diverse entities. In the case of this portrait, word-play in the inscription was accompanied by visual puns that elided his family's name and his psychological condition with sartorial choices - a dunne sleeve and an undone shirt. The more hidden material pun played upon his psychological condition and a pigment's alchemical composition. Donne's portrait implied the melancholy state of what was depicted with the melancholy nature of the material with which it was depicted. This was a politically, medically and cosmologically informed - as well as a masterfully obscure - conceit, and typical of his poetry.

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