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Title	Body, Soul, and Architecture in John Donne' s Metempsychosis
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Citation	Hiroshima studies in English language and literature , 64 : 70 - 71
Issue Date	2020-03-30
DOI	
Self DOI	
URL	https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00049028
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Body, Soul, and Architecture in John Donne's *Metempsychosis*

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John Donne's *Metempsychosis* (1601) incorporates a great deal of architectural imagery. The poem's introductory "Epistle," for example, includes an analogy between books and buildings; and the main text, referring to the Pythagorean theory of metempsychosis, unfolds the story of an undying soul's journey among the vegetative, animal, and human bodies, which the poet renders with an architectural metaphor. Although some critics have noted this imagery, few studies have been conducted on its significance in relation to the poem's theme. Viewing this kind of imagery in its historical context, we should pay particular attention to the use of flourishes in architecture in early modern England, since the metaphysical poets, including Donne, are often characterized by their use of scientific knowledge when composing poetry. The present study, involving both textual and contextual analysis, explores the significance of the architectural elements in *Metempsychosis*. My thesis consists of five parts: the introduction, three main chapters, and the conclusion, each of which is summarized below.

The introduction describes the background and purpose of the study, with a brief overview of the subsequent chapters. Quoting the first sentence of the poem's "Epistle," I first point out that Donne's presentation of the books/building analogy at the very beginning arguably indicates the importance of his consistent use of the architectural imagery. While sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England witnessed extensive importation of knowledge of Renaissance architecture from European countries, previous studies have rarely discussed this in relation to Donne's writing. My main aim, therefore, is to demonstrate the importance of his use of the architectural imagery in its historical context.

The first chapter lays the foundation for the more detailed discussion of the architectural matters in the subsequent two chapters. This chapter clarifies the poem's idiosyncratic characteristics by surveying the ways in which Donne and contemporary authors responded to the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis. The first feature is that the poem intermingles the biblical story of Genesis and the ancient heretical tenet for the purpose of questioning

the Christian preconception which uncritically accepts the superiority of human souls to vegetable and animal souls. The second peculiarity is found in the continuity of the body/building metaphor. Donne, using specific architectural terms, develops this conventional, if not banal, rhetoric into an elaborate series of expressions.

The second chapter shows how an examination of contemporary architectural knowledge can contribute to our deeper understanding of *Metempsychosis*, focusing particularly on the two vegetative bodies/buildings—the hanging apple and the standing mandrake—and analyzing them in comparison with literary, botanical, and architectural texts. Vegetables, unlike animals and humans, cannot move themselves; and therefore, some external force is required to cause their premature deaths. This chapter investigates the possibility of a housing problem in the vegetative buildings. I argue that the defectiveness of the two bodies/buildings reflects Donne's skeptical attitude towards architects and towards God as the Great Architect.

The third chapter discusses body/book metaphors in the poem in relation to Donne's other works and contemporary literature from the viewpoint of perfect/imperfect architecture. While such metaphors were frequently used as a rhetorical means of eternalizing poetry, *Metempsychosis* foregrounds the imagery of imperfect architecture. Although Donne imagines the compass as a tool for designing perfect architecture in his love lyric "A Valediction Forbidden Mourning," the compass should originally have been used by God. On the one hand, he emphasizes the imperfect quality of God's architecture, which should be perfect, but on the other, he depicts the perfect completion of lovers' carnal architecture, which should be imperfect.

The conclusion integrates my discussion and argues for the significance of the architectural imagery again. As Donne suggests by observing that "there's no pause at perfection" (line 339), *Metempsychosis* aims to reveal imperfection within the seemingly great beings and phenomena—the human body and soul, God, and Donne's poem itself—and to submit the problem to the readers. And it is in this respect that the architectural elements in the poem carry significance.