

John Donne: Love and Voices in the Elegies and
Songs and Sonnets.

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Note:

All quotations of John Donne's poetry are from Robin Robbins, ed. *The Complete Poems of John Donne* (Harlow: Longman, 2010).

Text quoted from the original have been left as they are, with the exception of u/v, i/j, and the long s which have been modernised.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Donne's *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonnets* found a readership trained to appreciate his words. It draws on the work of Wolfgang Iser. Iser particularly looks at the importance of a text providing a space in which the reader can imagine possibilities that extend his or her world. It is through voices that Donne connects with his readers, and creates worlds and spaces that they can explore. As his poetic control matures, Donne increasingly lives inside the poetic worlds he creates. At first, in the *Elegies*, his speaker is the societal observer and participant. Through this speaker, Donne will increasingly seek to educate his readers, and have them imagine new ways to approach life and love. In the *Elegies*, women will be the touchstone against which men measure their worth. In the *Songs and Sonnets* the speaker develops to be Donne himself, and the measure of worth will change to be the prospect of an androgynous, balanced, constant love. Donne explores the nature of what such a reciprocal love might look like, pushes rhetoric almost to breaking point, and seeks poetic solutions to the questions a challenging world poses. It is Donne's developing awareness of the power of voice that allows him to structure his world, finally face the agonizing loss of Anne, and contemplate a life with God. An awareness of biographical context will at times help to more fully understand his poetry. And it is voices, both real and imagined, that offer the reader the chance to participate in making meaning in that poetry.

Chapter One

The reader enters the poem: empty spaces filled.

In John Donne's poetry there are spaces without words. My aim is to explore both the voices Donne ventriloquises in his *Elegies* and *Songs* and *Sonnets*, and the voices that resonate in the empty spaces, to explore voices both heard and imagined. It is the female voice that Donne particularly liberates, a voice that often proves to be more powerful than its counterpart. It is her voice and her presence that increasingly become the touchstones against which Donne's male speakers measure themselves.

In the *Elegies*, Donne explores the concept of what a woman might be, and his poetry shares this conceptual understanding with the reader. The voices here are overheard, and crafted to prompt a reader's reappraisal of male behaviour towards women. In the early poetry, Donne's speakers become increasingly misogynistic. Relationships between men and women are taken apart, and the reader is positioned to consider how those relationships might best be re-established. Donne's speakers also become more powerful, and their voices eventually become strong enough for Donne to inhabit. In "The Bracelet," the speaker's voice is carping and at times uncertain; and in "To his Mistress Going to Bed," an opening imperative of verbs

becomes a torrent of prepositions. All is rhetorical flourish. With "The Comparison," Donne finds a voice powerful enough to take misogyny to its limit. Here he inhabits the voice of the speaker, and through this voice, works to explore his own thoughts and feelings. Now the speaker uses rhetoric not to control and deceive women, but more to prompt the reader to reassess what a loving relationship might be. After "Sappho and Philaenis," and Donne's adoption, in this poem, of a female persona and voice, general considerations of how men might relate to women cease, and Donne's explorations become increasingly personal.

He leaves behind both the more obviously misogynistic voices and the elegiac genre when he becomes involved with Anne, and explores his own developing relationship with her. In the later *Songs* and *Sonnets*, the female voice in the poetry becomes the means whereby his world will be structured. But voices, and the knowledge they instil, cannot always be controlled. Voices will, at times, prove uncomfortable for both reader and poet. Particularly in a rhetorical world, each poem is a space that invites reader involvement. From the start, Donne invites readers to share his poetic stage, and voices increasingly position readers to become active in making meaning. As his poetic control matures, Donne increasingly inhabits these spaces himself, and the poetry becomes his means of making sense of the challenges he faces.

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The manuscript and coterie tradition means that Donne's poems are personal, and Donne is acutely aware of this:

What the printing-presses bring to birth with inky travail, we take as it comes; but what is written out by hand is in greater reverence.¹

His coterie readership shared a language and a rhetorical awareness that facilitated reader involvement. Indeed, Donne's contemporaries are particularly aware of his "voice" and style, and happy to become involved in the way meaning is created; Ben Jonson criticizes Donne's verse for "not keeping of accent,"² and Thomas Carew in his "Elegy Upon the Death of Dr. Donne" feels that Donne had travelled beyond "the flower of fading rhetoric," and positions Donne as a poetic saviour:

Thou has't redeem'd, and open'd us a mine
 Of rich and pregnant fancy: drawn a line
 Of masculine expression ... (37-39)

Such a metaphor of pregnancy suggests Carew was aware of a voice being born.

This idea of poetic creation giving birth had appeared earlier in Sir Philip Sidney's

¹ Donne's original is in Latin. For this translation, see H.W. Garrod, "The Latin Poem Addressed by Donne to Dr Andrews," *The Review of English Studies*, 21:81 (1945): 38-42. This letter to Dr. Richard Andrews (he had attended Donne in a medical capacity) was written c. 1612. Donne had lent Andrews a book, which his children had torn, and so returned the book to Donne with the torn pages replaced in manuscript form. The quotation cited is from Donne's manuscript poem in response, assuring Andrews that he preferred the manuscript form, and all was well. Donne's reluctance to print his poems shows his words here to be more than simply a polite reply. This poem to Andrews was included in the second edition of Donne's poems, published in 1635.

² Ben Jonson, *Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 462.

"Astrophil and Stella," with a similar concatenation of female and male imagery.³ Elizabeth Harvey explores the prospect of the male poet "impregnating his muse" and looks at midwifery books of the period. She argues that voice "is often ambiguously and complicatedly gendered, crossing the boundary between sexes."⁴ For Harvey, classical and Renaissance texts written by male authors present a female voice that is "voiced by female characters in a way that seems either to erase the gender of the authorial voice or to thematize the transvestism of this process."⁵ Harvey's work on voice invites a further exploration of what women actually say, and what their silences mean.

I want to take this awareness of voice in another direction, and consider the need for readers to be able to provide the voice that will fill the spaces Donne creates, a voice that is other than simply ventriloquised by the poet.⁶ In "The Flea," for example, the woman clearly speaks and acts in the space between the stanzas. Hers is the voice of hesitant involvement to which the opening of the poem responds; and she has the independence of mind that allows her to reject the sophistry of Donne's argument and kill the flea. This woman may (or may not) be finally prepared to play the sexual game after the poem has concluded. The voice is

³ "Thus great with child to speak and pregnant in my throes/ Biting my truant pen, beating myself in spite —/"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write." Sir Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works* ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), I, 12-14, 152. Jennifer Pancenza stresses the lack of heterosexual consummation such a poetic birth entails. Jennifer Pancenza, "None Do Slacken, None Can Die: *Die* Puns and Embodied Time in Donne and Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, ed. Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 74.

⁴ Elizabeth Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voice: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1995), 78.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶ This need to extend Harvey's view of a ventriloquised voice is shared by others. See David Buck Beliles, *Theoretically Informed Criticism of Donne's Love Poetry: Towards Pluralist Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 7-22. Critical awareness of the variety of voices Donne displays in his poetry is not uncommon. See Achsah Guibbory, "Erotic Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136. A closer study of what this variety might suggest, is partly the point of this thesis.

clearly there, but the tone of that voice, and the specific words, are left for the reader to provide. And Donne's readers were trained to provide them.

Rhetoric was a foundational part of early modern grammar school education. Classical texts provided the basis of early modern learning, and pupils wrote back to classical writers in their thorough involvement with them. Control of rhetorical techniques was a mark of social standing, and schoolmasters were conscious of their boys needing to be "trained up."⁷ In following the classical texts, students were encouraged to adopt an ego, an identity. The *personae* they adopted allowed them to play different roles, explore different attitudes and passions that may not have been their own. Lynn Enterline argues that the teaching methods applied to the classical texts encouraged those students "to experience what passes for deep personal feeling precisely by taking a detour through the passions of others."⁸ When Donne based his elegies on ideas explored in Ovid, he was writing for an audience who was prepared; Ovid's penchant for speaking in the female voice provided a vocabulary for the young pupils to adopt and adapt. They not only wrote back to Ovid's women *as* women, but also acted out the fictionalized female role in front of their schoolmaster and classmates. Lynn Enterline takes from this that "the logical extension of school training in how to become a Latin-speaking

⁷ Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 6-7. Interestingly, Donne's own poetry was used later in the seventeenth century to improve the education of children. See Ernest W. Sullivan II and David Murrah eds., *The Donne Dalhousie Discovery: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Acquisition and the Study of the John Donne and Joseph Conrad Collections at Texas Tech University* (Lubbock: The Friends of the University Library/ Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, 1987), 32.

⁸ Enterline, *Schoolroom*, 25. This close relationship between text and audience was also apparent in early modern France. In discussing Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle's ideas on dramatic performances, Joseph Harris notes: "... Fontenelle ... implicitly casts us almost as actors, responding to the performance with the same tears we would shed were it real" Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator: Subjectivity and the Theatrical Experience in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133.

gentleman was, in fact, not simply a theater, but a transvestite theater."⁹ For Donne, each poem is a space that engages the reader, a stage on which the reader plays. At times this space is more specific in its demands, and requires a focused, writerly response from the reader. In a coterie and manuscript tradition, empty spaces particularly invite a personal response. Empty spaces are the gaps with which the reader is presented, and is invited to fill. It is the reader who imagines the demeanour of the woman in "To his Mistress Going to Bed," sees the actions of the woman between the stanzas of "The Flea," and pictures the woman's reaction to her lover's rhetoric in "The Sun Rising." Indeed, the empty space between the last two lines of "Woman's Constancy" invites a new concept of love, if only the reader is game to enter. These empty spaces also allow room for the woman's words to be heard, and there were many in the coterie who had the words to fill the expectant void.

Men were encouraged to consider a woman's reaction if they wanted to be successful in love. Because young male formal education involved separating the boy from the mother, both physically and linguistically, there was a need for gender roles to be explored, and to provide an awareness of the ways in which men and women might best relate. Enterline notes that in preparing a young man for future success, his study of classical languages had to take precedence over his English, vulgar "mother tongue."¹⁰ In searching for gender roles upon which they might rely, in having a clear sense of what a woman might be (after being separated from his mother), the young boy relied on watching and playing female roles as expounded in the classical texts, such as those explored in Ovid's *Heroides*.

⁹ Enterline, *Schoolroom*, 88, and Heinrich F. Plett notes: "Dramatic exercises ... occupy such an important place in the teaching of rhetoric in the Renaissance that practically every pupil was trained as an actor-poet." Heinrich F. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 283.

¹⁰ Enterline, *Schoolroom*, 139.

In Donne's poetry, observation of gender roles that men and women might play is given the room to be explored.

It is within this context of an active and involving rhetorical culture that we should hear Donne's voice. The Protestant preacher in England was reading texts such as John Ludham's 1577 translation of Andreas Hyperius, who saw preaching as a branch of rhetoric. Donne wrote *The Courtier's Library*, his satirical, mock catalogue of fashionable books appropriate for court aspirants, in the early 1600s.¹¹ In discussing Donne's text, Alison Shell notes that its readers were "obliged to read the gaps."¹² The dramatic power of a poetic voice was recognised. In his introduction to the 1591 edition of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Thomas Nashe invites the reader:

... to turn aside into this Theater of pleasure, for here you shall find a paper stage strewd with pearle, an artificial heav'n to overshadow the fair frame, & christal wals to encounter your curious eyes, while the tragicommodity of love is performed by starlight.¹³

Ideas on rhetoric were widely circulated; Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* was reprinted eight times between 1553 and 1585. George Puttenham's *The Arte of*

¹¹ For more on the dating of *The Courtier's Library*, see Piers Brown, "'Hac ex consilio meo via progredieris'; Courtly Reading and Secretarial Mediation in Donne's *The Courtier's Library*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61:3 (Fall, 2008), 833-848.

¹² Alison Shell, "Donne and Sir Edward Hoby: Evidence For An Unrecorded Collaboration," in *John Donne's Professional Lives: Studies in Renaissance Literature*, vol. 10, David Colclough, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 124.

¹³ Quoted in G. G. Smith ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 223.

English Poesie was published in 1589; it particularly emphasises the importance of figures of speech and the impact they can have in courtly discourse.¹⁴

The voices in Donne's poetry reflect this concern for the ways in which rhetoric was seen to structure early modern life. Through voice, Donne positions the reader to consider issues of constancy and individual worth. Donne creates spaces in which his readers can write, and he is interested in the efforts that his readers make.¹⁵ He hopes the reader response he garners will be appropriate. In *Satire II*, written about 1594, he criticises those who would take his ideas and claim them for their own:

For if one eat my meat, though it be known

The meat was mine, the excrement's his own.¹⁶ (29-30)

Donne is keen to have his readers accept his developing world-view. In *Biathanatos*, his essay on suicide, he cites classical allusions to assess a reader's worth:

If therefore of Readers, which Gorionides observes to be
foure sortes, (Spunges, which attract all without
distinguishing; Howerglasses, which receive, and power
out as fast; Baggs, which retayne onely the dregs of the

¹⁴ Plett, *Rhetoric*, 40. Enterline, *Schoolroom*, 24.

¹⁵ This early concern for his audience's response to his thoughts continues in Donne's later years. He directly challenges his audience to actively participate in and interact to create meaning in his sermons. See Mary Blackstone and Jeanne Shami, "Donne, Shakespeare, and the Interrogative Conscience," in Anderson and Vaught, *Shakespeare and Donne*, 88-89. Other writers were also concerned about their audience's response. Allison P. Hobgood notes that Ben Jonson "promises to rally his utmost creative energy only for playgoers who feel correctly." Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 161.

¹⁶ *Satyre 2*, in Robbins, *Poems*, 375-85.

Spices and let the Wine escape, And Seives which retayne
 the best onely) I find some of the last sorte, I doubt not
 but they may be hereby enlight'ned.¹⁷

And in a poem to the Countess of Bedford, upon hearing of the death of her brother, Lord Harrington, Donne notes that her brother was the very sort of reader he hoped for:

Just as a perfect reader doth not dwell,
 On every syllable, nor stay to spell,
 Yet without doubt, he doth directly see,
 And lay together every A and B¹⁸ (93-96)

But it is not only the ability of readers to fashion the words that they feel might best fit any empty spaces left in the poetry that is important; the poetry itself will lead readers in specific directions, have them face, as in "The Comparison," the prospect of a love-world that goes beyond the merely superficial.

Donne's use of the personal pronoun, for example, develops its own particular characteristic. Petrarchan laments of love are mostly individual laments expressed in the first person pronoun to a second person pronoun. For Donne, the plural pronoun develops from an unsubtle and brief rhetorical attempt to avoid recompensing his lover in "The Bracelet," to a repeated insistence in the song "The Good Morrow," where loving union is presented in a plural that includes a strong sense of physical purity before the Edenic fall. "We" is used sparingly (but

¹⁷ John Donne, *Biathanatos*, in Sullivan and Murrach, *Dalhousie*, 32.

¹⁸ Robbins, *Poems*, 774-799.

interestingly) in the *Elegies*, but becomes much more important in the *Songs and Sonnets*, where it will provide a rhetorical space in which the lovers can shelter from the world. Because of the nature of the coterie, sharing Donne's voice as they do, they too are included in the rhetorical possibilities that are offered by the plural pronoun; they are positioned to share with Donne and his lover a special world. Donne's *Elegies* may be on the page, but they are performative, and through that drama, they seek to transform, rather than simply inform. Of course, there is a significant rhetorical crossover between the genres of poetry and drama. Joel B. Altman sees the origins of a questioning drama in the study of formal rhetoric, particularly in "a mind conditioned to argue — *in utramque partem* — on both sides of the question."¹⁹ Inns of Court men were particularly encouraged to argue both sides of the argument and to go beyond the merely factual and legalistic truth. Emma Rhatigan notes that when Donne preached at Lincoln's Inn, he often chose to preach on apparently conflicting texts, one on the Sunday morning, and the other in the afternoon.²⁰ Both Cicero and Quintilian also believed fundamental questions of justice and injustice went beyond legal niceties. Cicero notes:

... certain matters must be considered with time and intention
and not merely by their absolute quality. In all these matters,
one must think what the occasion demands and what is worthy
of the persons concerned, and one must consider not what is

¹⁹ Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind. Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 3.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 3-6, 53. This process of arguing both sides of the question is described in a report on the Inns of Court, written in 1540. See J.H. Baker, "The third university 1450-1550: law school or finishing school?" in *The Intellectual and Cultural World of the Early Modern Inns of Court*, ed. Jayne Elizabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 19. Although some aspects of the Inns of Court may have changed by the early seventeenth century, Donne clearly maintained this practice. See Emma Rhatigan, "The sinful history of mine own youth: John Donne preaches at Lincoln's Inn," *ibid.*, 96-97. Donne was Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn from 1616 to 1622.

being done but with what spirit anything is done.²¹

With drama, Altman also claims a personal, values-assessing involvement for the audience:

... the plays functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme, to entertain opposing ideals, and by so exercising the understanding, to move toward some fuller apprehension of truth that could be discerned only through the total action of the drama.²²

Donne's speakers show that it is not the control of rhetoric that suggests the worth of a man, but the intention of that rhetoric. And there is a further important consideration. The rhetorical action does not end when the persuasive act is finished, but carries on and extends into the future, with a continuing ability to alter the recipient's understanding of the world.²³ In positioning his readers, Donne creates opportunities for ongoing considerations and reactions to occur.

Donne's poetry invokes the connected worlds of school-room learning, rhetorical style advice, and early modern drama. His words do not merely state something, they perform something. His poetry both makes and unmakes the world as we know it, and creates new possibilities to consider. Donne's words transform the world from which they spring, and the poems exist at the edge of

²¹ Cicero, *De inventione* 2, trans. H. M. Hubbell, (London: Harvard University Press, 1949), 176.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ Wilbur S. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 138-145. Also note Thomas O. Sloane, *On the Contrary. The Protocol of Traditional Rhetoric*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 223-227.

linguistic practice. They create their own authority and renegotiate the roles that both lovers and readers might adopt within their society. When, for example, he puns on proper names, on "done" and "more," he extends the boundaries that limit those proper names and goes beyond the restrictions that John Donne and Anne More faced. He creates new paradigms with words; a world where a pair of compasses can be imbued with new meaning,²⁴ and a bed can become an "everywhere."²⁵

To most fully explore Donne's poetry we need to go beyond seeing it only through the prism of rhetoric and classical *exempla*, and see it also as a stage play; the poetry provides voices that lead the reader to question and re-evaluate. David Schalkwyk notes that, "The performative view of language emphasises language as utterance — as a form of action that responds and anticipates a world of others while seeking to transform that world and the speaker's relationship to it."²⁶ Donne stages voices, and we experience the limits of his language; then we are shown what lies *beyond* that language and rhetoric, and we imagine a breadth of possibilities. Donne's voices do more than explore what people say; they explore how they live. Lynne Magnusson writes that conversation is "a cooperative, or collaborative activity."²⁷ She argues that it has the power to help constitute the self and construct the speaker through social interaction. When mistakes between people are made, language is repaired and reworked; and so many of Donne's poems have to work to repair a situation.

²⁴ "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," in Robbins, *Poetry*, (25-32), 257-261.

²⁵ "The Sun Rising," in Robbins, *Poetry*, (29), 245-249.

²⁶ David Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 239.

²⁷ Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144.

It is, then, what the text does to the reader that is important, and in this regard, the ideas of Wolfgang Iser are especially helpful. Although he is mostly interested in the novel, his theories might also situate manuscript, coterie poetry.²⁸ His work helps to account for the spaces that I have identified in the poetry as not really empty, and accommodates the imagined voices those spaces contain. Like Magnusson, Iser sees literature as a means whereby humans can reconstitute themselves, but Iser more fully explores the role that the imagination can play, and the varying theatrical scenarios that can be envisioned. It is this human capacity to play in this imaginary space that leads readers to travel new avenues to places they may eventually inhabit.²⁹ Iser directs his attention to the impact the text has on the reader. Hobgood also sees Renaissance theatre as a space in which playgoers could play, and question their lives, and take risks. She notes that the energy that makes the self viable "comes to life through emotional interchanges between stage and world"³⁰ It is this pivotal awareness of the interaction between text and reader that addresses the problem of a simplistic reader-response theory, that it is simply "uncontrolled subjectivism," where the effect of a literary work is more important than the work itself. For Iser, attention must be paid to the way the words and rhetoric, in conjunction with the reader, create the performance of the work.³¹

²⁸ Ben De Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), n. 12, 13, 35.

²⁹ Schalkwyk embraces a concept of the literary with which Iser would agree, though he too might make more of the prospect of play and drama:

"... if our involvement in what we have communally instituted as the 'literary' stems at least in part from its capacity to show us the institution and relationships between the concepts of our language, it also opens the space for the constitution, however brief and unstable, of an imaginary consensus whereby paradigms may be shifted, concepts renegotiated." Schalkwyk, *Speech*, 48.

³⁰ Hobgood, *Playgoing*, 188-189.

³¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 23, 26-7. Scholarship in the field of cognitive studies supports Iser's views of audience perception. See Bruce McConachie, *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, *Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Literature allows us to imagine beyond the worlds we have already experienced; this is a significant aspect of being human, and Iser posits that there is little clear distinction between fiction and reality. Rather, a number of alternate worlds have been created, and these invite and await exploration. It is this space that literature provides that encourages both reader and listener to live life beyond their daily round. Iser calls this capacity to imagine who and what we might be, "literary anthropology":

If a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously reveals something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall makeup. The question arises as to why we need this particular medium. Questions of this kind point to a literary anthropology that is both an underpinning and an offshoot of reader-response criticism.³²

When readers imagine, they create a stage on which both fictional characters and responsive readers play out life's possibilities. If the text does not create possibilities for the reader to imagine, then that text has exactly mirrored the real world, and the act of reading has been a waste of time. For Iser and Donne, worthwhile literary worlds provide a space in which readers can consider ideas beyond their everyday experience. In "The Comparison," for example, the real world has been particularly exaggerated and readers are positioned to go beyond

³² Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University, 1993), vii. Iser's ideas are being extended in the more recent field of cognitive cultural studies. See Alan Palmer, "Storyworlds and Groups" in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, Lisa Zunshine (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 176-192.

the words of the poet and, on the stage created, to imagine what life might be. Donne has gone beyond Puttenham's exhortations to create aesthetic delight, where "every clause by it selfe, and every single word carried in a clause, may have their pleasant sweetness apart" when he arrests the reader with contemplations of "sper'tic issue of ripe menstr'ous boils."³³ It is through literature that we bring disparate elements into a new whole, and this process is the means whereby we make sense of our world.³⁴ Donne's use of direct voice, and its imagined response, presents new worlds for the reader to consider. Literary language is what "speaks" in the language, what conveys nuanced meaning. The apparent silences of Donne's women, for example, are not examples of passive speechlessness, but are rather eloquent silences that reflect opposition to rhetorical falsity. Just as Shakespeare's Cordelia seeks to show up the rhetorical manipulation of her sisters by saying "nothing," so for Donne's women silence does not mean a refusal to participate in life.³⁵

If we have spaces left in the poetry to fill, and readers trained to fill them and enter that poetry, trained to supply the words of the personae, then we have drama; we have a stage on the page, and spaces in which contemporary issues are played out. Iser suggests we should adopt a triad of the real, the fictive and the imaginary if we are to explain how a text is made and to explore what this text

³³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. G. D. Willcock and A Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 160. "The Comparison" (8), in Robbins, *Poems*, 301.

³⁴ This interaction between reader and text generates the aesthetic component of Iser's theory. See Iser, *Act*, 179. Murray Kreiger takes a similar line: "... the role of any text, when we allow it to function in an aesthetic mode for us, is not to counter one ideology with another, but rather, as with the moment of carnival, to reveal the inadequacies of ideology itself, as a conceptual discourse, to deal with errant particularity." Murray Kreiger, "My Travels with the Aesthetic," in *Revenge of the Aesthetic*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 227.

³⁵ For some seventeenth century ideas as to how women should verbally behave, see Barnebe Rich: "The woman of modesty openeth not her mouth but with discretion, neither is there any bitterness in her tongue: shee seemeth in speaking, to hould her peace, and in her silence she seemeth to speake." Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1613), 29.

might do.³⁶ Readers are both participants and observers and are involved in discovering the truths that underpin the poem: they see the venality that displaces love in "The Bracelet," the mounting physical excitement that can make a young man vulnerable in "To his Mistress Going to Bed." Both inside and outside the poetry, Donne has created and populated a stage thrumming with life and resounding with voices that make that life real.

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There are three voices apparent in Donne's poetry; they combine and interact to create a nuanced view of the world Donne inhabits, and reflect Donne's attempts to make sense of that world. Firstly, there is the voice of the speaker of Donne's poems. I refer to the discourse articulators in Donne's poetry as "speakers." In doing so, I am aware that much of the meaning of the poems is conveyed in the written techniques, the syntax and line length. Guillaume Fourcade distinguishes the need for a more "neutral" term, and refers to Donne's "utterers." While he is right to note "the carefully plotted hovering between orality and writing" in the *Songs and Sonnets*, I allow more weight to the dramatic power of the poetry which "speakers" acknowledges.³⁷ In the earlier poems and elegies, the speakers are recognisable, and often flawed, dramatic stereotypes. They do not

³⁶ Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 1, and n. 2, 3, 4, on 305. For a brief overview of Iser's theory, that particularly addresses the democratic implications of that theory, see Paul B. Armstrong, "The Politics of Play: The Social Implications of Iser's Aesthetic Theory," *New Literary History* 31:1 (Winter, 2000): 211-223. For a full exploration of Iser's theory, see De Bruyn, *Wolfgang*. For a critical assessment of Iser's theory, see Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 68-84. Note De Bruyn responds to Fish. See De Bruyn, *Wolfgang*, 98-100.

³⁷ See Guillaume Fourcade, "Traces of Nothing: self-reflecting acts of writing in John Donne's love poems," *Studies Episteme: Acts of Writing in Early Modern England* 21 (Printemps, 2012), n. 5.

always like women.³⁸ These are voices created to amuse and entertain the coterie: the venality and rhetorical journey of the dismissive speaker in "The Bracelet," the increasingly flurried words of the young man in "To his Mistress Going to Bed," the explosion of misogyny in the similes of "The Comparison," the outrageous wit of the speaker in "The Flea." As Donne's poetry develops, the speaker becomes less of a recognisable character about whom both Donne and his reader might feel superior, and becomes more of a character with recognisably Donnean traits, who needs to put his world in perspective. This development in the voice of the speaker is apparent in "Sappho to Philaenis," and in later poems such as "The Canonization" and "A Valediction: Of the Book."

The second voice we hear both in and beyond Donne's poetry is the voice of the woman. This can be a strong, and as previously suggested, an implied voice that occasions an inadequate male response, as in "The Apparition" or "Love's Pupil," or excites reader imagination in "To his Mistress Going to Bed." Or it can be a voice both imagined and heard, that in "The Flea," particularly demands reader involvement. It can be a voice ventriloquised by the speaker, as in "The Comparison," when the speaker is bent on representing an honest litany of the needs a woman might demand in her relationship with a man. Sometimes, Donne's women speak the entire poem, as in "Sappho to Philaenis" and "Woman's Constancy." These women are not models to be emulated; they rather expect better from their men, and are often to be feared. Their voices will not be stilled; even their silences are deafening. Whether explicitly voiced or implicitly heard, the

³⁸ For an historical overview, and a discussion of misogyny in Donne's poetry, see Theresa M. DiPasquale, "Donne, women, and the spectre of misogyny," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 678-689.

woman's voice is a touchstone that challenges their male counterpart to see the world in a new way.

Then there is the voice of Donne himself. Just as the female voice seems irrepressible in so many of his poems, so Donne's own opinions bubble inexorably to the surface. His is the voice behind the speaker, the voice aware of the woman's strength, the voice that inhabits the societal images. In "The Bracelet" his voice is a wink and a nod to the coterie in his perhaps too arrogant dismissal of Kyd as a mere rhymester for hire, and in "To his Mistress Going to Bed" his voice is in the implied sexual superiority that attends his creation of the finally uncertain youthful lover. Donne's own voice is at times a strong educational prompt to the coterie to consider an alternative way to see women as in "The Comparison," and is at times disguised as an offering of a higher religious possibility in "The Relic." Donne's voice, in "Love's Pupil," is an early tentative awareness that something other than rhetorical control is needed to sustain a balanced and equal love, and in "The Sun Rising" it is an ever-changing cheekiness designed to impress the woman sharing his bed. And at times, as in "Sappho to Philaenis," it is an anguished cry of thwarted love that cannot be contained by the poetry, and explodes in the heart-wrenching "my half, my all, my more."

These voices are all the more powerful for the backdrops against which they operate. There are references to chiming watches and busks, to religious imagery, to coinage and a bald French monarch, to the enclosure movement and the economic strictures on the young educated swains of the time. The poetry seems to spring from the real world. There is reference to fellow writers, discovery and exploration, public executions and royal profligacy. Such breadth of images anchors the coterie reader in a world he knows; new possibilities are more likely

to be accepted if they are related to the familiar. And at times underpinning this societal depiction is a sense of humour that places the unaware speaker in a negative light in "Love's Pupil," or suggests the sun's arrival tomorrow might be more decorously provided for if it is a little delayed. Such alleviating flashes of humour and recognition of the daily round ease the reader's entry into Donne's poetic world. By the end of his poetic journey, the voices of Donne's speakers will be strong enough to question and interrogate God.

In the next chapter I explore the elegies that preceded the Anniversaries. Following that, a further chapter is devoted to the special position occupied by "Sappho to Philaenis." The elegiac genre allows Donne to hone his craft, and provides a space beyond formal Petrarchan limitations in which he can observe and comment upon his world. This concatenation of voices will assume greater power in the *Songs and Sonnets* written after 1598, when the resonance of both Donne's voice, and Anne's, will be heard more clearly. With their marriage in December 1601, his poetry changes, and becomes more focused on exploring a self-contained world of love. The page will still be a place that entertains and educates and instructs the reader, but will increasingly be the stage whereon Donne will try to work through his own ideas on life and love and religion. I will explore this development in chapters four and five. To the very end, voices both real and imagined will envelop both reader and poet.

Chapter Two

Ovid extended: beyond sexual conquest.

Donne was at the forefront of elegiac experimentation.³⁹ Traditionally, English elegies were associated with sadness and death; Donne published "A Funeral Elegy" in 1611. But in the 1590s he much more frequently broadened the elegiac form as it was used in England to follow the Ovidian model and explore a broad range of topics. Donne extends the ideas Ovid presents in the *Amores* and the *Heroides*. In Elegy V, "Her Kisses," for example, Ovid simply fears another lover may have been a better love teacher. Donne goes further in "Love's Pupil," where the love tutor enables his lover to continue to grow beyond any influence either her husband, or he, can command. And in "To his Mistress Going to Bed," the clear depiction of the woman's clothing and jewellery, and especially the speaker's tonal changes, take the poem beyond Ovid's realm in "The Afternoon Affair."⁴⁰ Raymond-Jean Frontain notes that in the *Heroides*, the letter form particularly involves the

³⁹ For a further discussion of the place of the elegy in Elizabethan poetry, see Alan Armstrong, "The Apprenticeship of John Donne: Ovid and the Elegies." *Journal of English Literary History* (ELH) 44, no. 3 (Autumn, 1977): 419-442.

⁴⁰ Ovid, *Amores*, 2.5, and 1.5. trans. Grant Showerman, rev. G. P. Goold. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

reader, allowing him or her to decide how the work might be read, and which version of events the reader might believe.⁴¹ Donne explores the depth of a love beyond gender boundaries, extends Ovid's ideas, and at the end of "Sappho to Philaenis," the reader contemplates a love beyond "all," a love that is "more."

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Although the order in which Donne intended his elegies to be published is unclear, there is some evidence to suggest that he intended "The Bracelet" to open any publication that might make it to print.⁴² There was, of course, a difference between what Donne may have wanted, and what was allowed. It was not until the second edition of his poems was published in 1635 that the blasphemous analogy of coins and angels in "The Bracelet" was seen as acceptable.⁴³

As with many poems by Donne, in "The Bracelet" we are instantly in the middle of an argument, one so forcefully put by the woman that the speaker has to use all of the rhetorical skills at his command to counter her insistence. Here is one of Iser's arguments, writ large: "... fictions, by making something possible, have a performative character."⁴⁴ The speaker is certainly performing, his language rhetorically crafted. The negatives set the scene: "Not that ... Nor that ... Nor for ...

⁴¹ Raymond-Jean Frontain, "Donne's Erotic Spirituality: Ovidian Sexuality and the Language of Christian Revelation in Elegy XIX," *Ball State University Forum* 25 (1984): 41-54.

⁴² Helen Gardner's claim that there was a "Book of Elegies" circulating has been generally rejected. See Gary A. Stringer, ed. *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 2, *The Elegies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), xcvi-xcvii. Also Robbins, *Poems*, 228. For more on Donne's position in the evolution of the elegy, see Alan Armstrong, "The Apprenticeship of John Donne: Ovid and the Elegies," *Journal of English Literary History* (ELH), 44: 3 (Autumn 1977): 419-442. Also note Stringer, *Elegies*, xciv.

⁴³ Donne would continue to use a variety of voices to great effect in his later sermons. See Blackstone and Shami, *Interrogative Conscience*, 101-103.

⁴⁴ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 151.

Nor for." This is a man whose mistress would let him wear a hair bracelet, yet who denies him any real affection beyond the token sign:

Not that in colour it was like thy hair,
 For armlets of that thou may'st let me wear;
 Nor that thy hand it oft embraced and kissed,
 For so it had that good which oft I missed. (1-4)

Helen Gardner notes that these lines evoke Thomas Kyd's tragedy *Soliman and Perseda*, and the knowing wits of the coterie would be expected to smile at the satirical allusion:⁴⁵

Nor for that seely old morality
 That as those links are tied our love should be,
 Mourn I; that thy sevenfold chain have lost,
 Nor for the luck's sake, but the bitter cost. (5-8)

Donne's awareness of voice is thoughtful. The speaker combines himself and his lover in the plural pronoun "our", only to slide into a sense of his individual self-importance with the following "Mourn I." Any joint existence does not last long, and the drama of the poem builds: the poem begins in the middle of a lover's testy dialogue, and the cumulating negatives end with a positive, and the positive is venal. Herein lies the humour, with a speaker so self-obsessed, about to try to justify the loss of the gold bracelet and avoid any responsibility. The ambiguity of

⁴⁵ Helen Gardner, ed. *John Donne: The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 112. In 1593 Kyd was arrested and tortured for opinions apparently falsely attributed to him.

the "bitter cost," both of the actual worth of the bracelet, and the cost of the relationship, opens up the poem.⁴⁶ Where Kyd's characters more simply argue which of them had the greatest influence on the tragedy that unfolds, Donne involves his readers much more in the action; he goes beyond leading his readers to an author-provided rhetorical conclusion and places them in a position where they are more likely to come to their own assessment of the relative worth of the protagonists.⁴⁷ From his earliest poetic explorations, he opens up the broad complexities of his world for his readers to consider. This is Donne's particular legacy: voices swirl in his verse and bring the reader into the poem, making the audience an integral part of the action. Here is Iser's triad: the move from the reality we know, the experience of the fictive through the language of the poetry, and the capacity for the imaginary which allows the reader to finally see the possibilities beyond the words, and that the speaker has lost much more than the bracelet.

It is not the missing coins that are most important; Donne's focus is rather on the inadequacy of a commercial love based on the speaker's sense of his own rhetorical cleverness. The coins are personified; we see them, proffered (but in a position easily retractable) in his hand. This is the drama Donne habitually evokes, bringing the audience onto the stage. The words, and punctuation, involve the reader, and the careless lover's voice sounds clear. The coterie may have smiled at the suggestion that the coins are more important than sex; the speaker's lover may be less amused: they will comfort his soul "when I lie or rise —." Again, in his

⁴⁶ Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne: Coterie Poet*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 60-61, particularly notes the importance of money in attaining and cementing one's place in 1590s society.

⁴⁷ Thomas Kyd, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda*, (United Kingdom, Garsington: Benediction Classics, 2010). For more on the role such reader involvement and questioning might generally play in making meaning, see Marvin Carlson, "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: Iowa City Press, 1991), 84.

earliest poems, Donne plays with language to create the likely reader response.

Like a small child in trouble, the speaker transfers his guilt to the coins:

Shall they be damned and in the furnace thrown
And punished for offences not their own? (19-20)

The speaker's voice betrays uncertainty. The self-mocking petulant indignation of "I would not spit to quench the fire they were in" (47), is reinforced by the purposefully lame and unsophisticated rhythm and import of "For they are guilty of much heinous sin" (48). The speaker struggles to maintain his stance. But the disdain he exhibits to the woman is not powerful enough to obliterate her presence. What is created here is a more real and nuanced existence than Kyd's characters exhibit. The coterie watch and listen as the speaker tries to extract himself from a weak and self-revealing position.

In the following lines, Donne will do what he so often does throughout his poetry and will refer to his own position as a poet in a society that would not turn poetic recognition into sustainable employment.⁴⁸ The tension builds, and the woman's inevitable response is further delayed by the insistent "Oh." Donne plays games with his audience too, the developing reference to Kyd's play also providing them with a distraction. Iser notes that the meaning all texts establish "is one of participation, and not of explanation."⁴⁹ The reader, like the loser of the bracelet, is being sidetracked and manipulated:

⁴⁸ Note the opening line of "The Canonization," and the depiction of courtiers as "ants" in "The Sun Rising." Robbins, *Poems*, 149, and (8), 247.

⁴⁹ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 90.

Oh, be content that some loud-squeaking crier,
 Well pleased with one lean, threadbare groat for hire,
 May like a devil roar through every street,
 And gall the finder's conscience if they meet (55-58)

Donne is aware of the rhetorical devices that should attend effective speech, the need for changed modulation and strategic stress. He wants the audience to pay attention to the characters he creates. The wit of the weak rhyme of "conjurer/paper," that suggests the poet may not be as wealthy as the astrologer, but (cheekily) has more moral strength, fails to stop the woman trying to interrupt yet again. The astrologer's words, even brought to life, are not strong enough:

And if, when all his art and time is spent,
 He say 'Twill ne'er be found', oh be content (65-66)

Direct speech invites the reader to hear the voices, both that of the speaker, and the astrologer he mimics. Donne provides the space for the reader to experience the "personation" that is such a part of early modern rhetoric.

She will not be put off with such rhetoric, and we hear her words for the first time. Even repeated, they are the words of a "dread judge":

Thou sayst, 'Alas, the gold doth still remain
 Though it be changed and put into a chain'. (69-70)

The disturbingly simple clarity of her rhyme presents the uncomfortable truth: the bracelet is still missing. This sends the speaker off on a further witty exercise where he suggests that to replace the bracelet with his gold would be sacrilegious. Whatever words the reader imagines her to have said must be powerful enough to result in the exasperated tone and yet unquenched wordplay of the next line:

But thou art resolute; thy will be done. (79)

The balance of the sentence suggests he has surrendered to her imprecations; indeed, her power seems god-like. Throughout the poem, Donne has given her a glimpse of being united with her lover in the plural pronoun, has appealed to her sexual and venal desires, her nationalistic fervour, and her depth of religious awareness. She has heard all he has to say, and with the semi-colon in line 79 he pauses; we hear his breath of resignation in the thick "th" sounds of "thou" and "thy," and in the exhalation of "will," a quite different tone from that used in the more prayerful context. Yet even now he cannot help himself, and puns on his name: she will be Donne indeed. Her venality, her need to have restitution for the lost bracelet is as powerful as his need to keep his angels.⁵⁰ The speaker tries to divert blame by cursing others:

Here, fettered, manacled, and hanged in chains

First may'st thou be, then chained in hellish pains; (95-96)

⁵⁰ The question of what might, or might not be, an intentional pun, is explored by Julian Lamb. Julian Lamb, "Aspects, Physiognomy, and the Pun: A reading of Sonnet 135 and 'A Valediction of Weeping,'" in *Shakespeare and Donne*, ed. Anderson and Vaught, 148-166. Where I feel Donne is consciously punning on his own name, or on More, I let the poetry speak for itself. Donne punned on his own name throughout his life, in a cheeky letter to his new father-in-law, to conclude a letter to Henry Wotton ("Sir, more than kisses") (Robbins, *Poetry*, 88), and in "To Christ," a heartfelt poem written after Anne's death, in which he rededicates himself to God. Robbins, *Poems*, 575-579.

The curse not only has its antecedents in myriad classical analogues, but also reflects what was happening in 1593: Donne's brother was arrested and tortured for harbouring a Catholic priest and died in Newgate prison, and Kyd was arrested on the basis of papers found in his home, which he claimed belonged to Christopher Marlowe.⁵¹ Again, Donne may be playing delightful poetical games, but they are couched in terms that reflect an acute and demonstrable awareness of his social milieu:

Or libels or some interdicted thing
Which, negligently kept, thy ruin bring.
Lust-bred diseases rot thee and dwell with thee
Itchy desire and no ability. (101-104)

This reference to Kyd's position provides a neat bookend to the poem and in the midst of the personal sadness over his brother's death, there is still the humour in the poetry that allows Donne to cope, like the appropriate short line that concludes with "no ability."⁵² For Donne, poetry had a "cher'shing fire which dries in me/ Grief which did drown me."⁵³ This is a poetic performance, with just a vocal twist or two remaining:

⁵¹ For analogues, see Robbins, *Poems*, 160. For more on Henry Donne's arrest, trial and death, see John Stubbs, *John Donne: The Reformed Soul*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 43. For more on Kyd, see Stringer, *Varorium*, vol.2, (101-02), 541.

⁵² The humour here lies in the visual; though not a shorter line metrically, it has fewer words. In discussing Iser's PhD thesis on Fielding, and the role humour plays in making meaning, De Bruyn notes Iser's awareness that "When reality does not behave as we want it to ... all we can do is laugh." De Bruyn, *Wolfgang*, 16. Sigmund Freud is also aware of the power of wit and humour, and the significant role they play in forcing us to question social mores. See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (trans.) James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1963), especially 115.

⁵³ In a letter to Rowland Woodward, in Robbins, *Poems*, 54.

But I forgive; repent then, honest man.
 Gold is restorative: restore it than.
 Or, if with it thou be'st loath to depart,
 Because 'tis cordial, would t'were at thy heart. (111-114)

She must be careful not to be hardened by avarice, and this last word balances all of the selfishness exhibited in the poem and encourages his mistress to re-evaluate the lost bracelet. And the audience re-evaluates the worth of the bracelet too.

There are strong suggestions this poem was written in 1593. It was certainly written before Donne met Anne More in 1598.⁵⁴ It exhibits much of what we will see in his subsequent poetry: the careful diction and syntax, the dramatic argument, the wit. It is characterized by a vivid *sprezzatura*, a display of cleverness designed to appear unforced and easily achieved. Behind the comic self-concern exists the voice of the female lover, both heard and imagined. In light of this female voice, the careless lover is not as certain in his certainty as might be. He has to overwhelm her with his rhetorical skill. That he is forced to go as far as he does in this poem is testament to her strength of opposition and an intelligence (and a venality) that can combat his. Her voice, both real and imagined, is the touchstone that reveals his selfishness; his behaviour has nothing more to recommend it than rhetorical flourish. The speaker lacks the ability to see his world anew, and the reader is positioned to see the limitations of his short-sightedness. Donne has made it easy for the reader to be involved. There is no deep philosophical question to be considered; the poem is an intellectual calling card, an amusement rather than a challenging exploration of love.

⁵⁴ Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 104.

In this early poem, the need for something beyond economic worth that might make a relationship special is only hinted at. But the voices that swirl about Donne's characters and the space created for coterie involvement are there from the very first; the audience has been manipulated into the role of poetic participant, to realise life dramatically, as it is lived. Against a backdrop of realistic societal observations, Donne has created characters that entertain and amuse. In later poems he will realise the greater role his poetry might play, and his purpose will be much more specifically focused.

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In "To his Mistress Going to Bed," Donne handles the speaker's voice more deftly. Iser's awareness of the essential nature of the human capacity to imagine, and how that imagination can be set alight by the text, reinforces claims for the reader's involvement in this unfolding seduction scene.⁵⁵ This is a poem designed to engage the coterie, showcase the young Donne's poetic facility, and intimate the poet's own love-making expertise. Unlike the large cast of voices in "The Bracelet," this is a two-hander. Again, the young man who attempts to seduce the older woman is not Donne, but a character he creates, a sexual adventurer who wants to explore a woman as an object. Just as the careless lover in "The Bracelet" undergoes a rhetorical journey, with an ebb and flow of rhetorical command, so the aspirant in "To his Mistress Going to Bed" journeys to (perhaps) an even more

⁵⁵ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, xvii.

indecisive point. The speaker's voice moves from the certainty that her hesitation will be overcome, to flurried unease, and finally embraces nothing but a misogynistic stance.

The young man initially assumes she will understand his wit; words also seduce. He hopes she might smile at the sexual "I" with which Hamlet would later embarrass Ophelia.⁵⁶ But the love world he promises with a forceful succession of verbs, proves unconvincing. He promotes himself as an accomplished and persistent lover, as more than a "busy fool." The details of the scene are real, a credible backdrop that makes the love aspirant's behaviour more starkly believable: the audience sees her jewelled undergarments, hears her chiming watch; even the time is right. Donne is doing so much more than simply describing a situation. The words reveal a love aspirant whose intention and worth are laid bare before the reader. The young lover's progress is captured in the personal pronouns, her more distanced "you" and "yourself" still not joined with his sexually keen "I." The initial rhetorical avalanche contains within it seeds of doubt, and the seduction is far from assured. He uses every suggestion he can muster to have her succumb; to make love is a natural prospect.⁵⁷ The pace quickens with the imperative "Now," and the shoes are removed; love is also spiritual, a physical path whereby purity can be attained — their place of love-making is a "hallowed temple."⁵⁸ He tries to woo her with the more informal, more archaically poetic

⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works), ed. Richard Proudfoot et al. (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Son, 1998) III, ii, 109-124, 312.

⁵⁷ Such bucolic references as "flowery meads" are not often seen in Donne's poetry. The site of this seduction may well be a grassy bower. In an architectural time before corridors and closed doors, of rooms through which many might pass, privacy was often attained more easily outdoors. See Mary Thomas Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 9:1 (Spring/Summer, 2009): 4-22.

⁵⁸ Frontain sees Donne's uncovering of the woman as akin to a spiritual experience. Objects such as girdles and breastplates and buskins were also masculine forms of vesture. Yet another, more complex verbal joust for the coterie to ponder. Raymond-Jean Frontain, "Donne's Erotic Spirituality:

"thou" and "thee."⁵⁹ Such rhetorical manipulation clearly presupposes her ability to understand the speaker's cleverness, and her capacity to be influenced by it. She is emerging from the poem as a woman worthy of the most solicitous of lovers. Carey points to the class of the woman, a challenging pursuit whereby the speaker hopefully "gratifies not only his sexual but also his social and financial ambitions."⁶⁰ With fewer clothes, the social separation of "madam" which began the poem is also falling away; they are now combined in the plural "we."⁶¹

Her non-verbal response forces the youthful lover to alter his approach, and the tone and speed of delivery become more frenetic. Donne captures the speaker's fear of failure. Words now tumble forth:

License my roving hands, and let them go
 Behind, before, above, between, below!
 O my America! My new-found land!
 My kingdom, safest when with one man manned!
 My mine of precious stones! My empery!
 How blessed am I in this discovering thee!
 To enter in these bonds is to be free:
 Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be. (25-32)

Ovidian Sexuality and the Language of Christian Revelation in Elegy XIX," *Ball State University Forum* 25 (1984): 41-54.

⁵⁹ By the end of the sixteenth century, "thou" and "thee" were used more as a literary device, especially by dramatists to explore emotional or intimate relationships. See Kathleen M. Wales, "Thou and You in Early Modern English: Brown and Gilman Re-appraised," *Studia Linguistica* 37:2 (December, 1983): 121.

⁶⁰ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 106.

⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of pronouns, see Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare's Grammar* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2003), 67-101.

Donne's young man is now uncontrollably excited between the commas that follow the flowing enjambment. Rhetoric gives way to urgent anticipation; prepositions become adverbs and a succession of breathless vowels captures an increasingly manic foreplay. All seems a conjunction of opposites, of negative capability, and the tension creates an exquisite moment indeed. The voice of the careless bracelet recipient seems weak and wheedling by comparison. Donne's young lover may be more uncertain before his mistress, but his vocal display, and the changes that display undergoes, are more powerful. The mistress who has excited this display has found no need to speak at all. His hands may explore her body, but she has to "License" them. This is her power over him. Just as Queen Elizabeth had to license Raleigh's American explorations, so the hopeful lover's excursions need to be similarly sanctioned.⁶² In creating spaces the reader might enter, Donne is providing a poetic stage for discovery in a time when explorers also literally sought new worlds to explore. The reader's awareness of her power and position continues to grow. For the love aspirant, nothing is fixed or certain. The attempt to have full control of his mistress by using the word "seal" is belied by the panting rhythm of the preceding lines. He is using everything he knows, both legal and spiritual arguments, to try to ensure her compliance.⁶³ This is not the image of the male in control with which the poem began; the opening forcefulness of "Come, madam" and the demanding verbs that follow appear now as attempts to control the uncontrollable.

⁶² M. Thomas Hester sees these references as Donne's criticism of Raleigh. M. Thomas Hester, "Donne's (Re)Annunciation of the Virgin(ia Colony) in *Elegy XIX*," *Southern Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* 4 (1987): 49-64. Iser notes it is the fearless reader and critic who explores the gap, the unchartered "no-man's land" between text and interpretation. Iser, *The Implied Reader. Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), xiii.

⁶³ Donne will use the same image of "seals" in the later poem, "The Relic." Robbins, *Poems*, (29), 242.

Her partial divestment of clothing makes her prospective lover increasingly discombobulated, and he cannot help but undermine his own argument. His professed understanding of women is challenged by his mocking "imputed grace". For a man who believes his control of words can ensure the most challenging seduction, he really does not display much control at all:

Like pictures, or like books' gay cov'rings made
 For lay men, are all women thus arrayed:
 Themselves are mystic books, which only we
 Whom their imputed grace will dignify
 Must see revealed. (39-43)

This is the voice of a love aspirant who claims to be perceptive and intelligent enough to read and understand the book of deepest mysteries. But his voice can neither hide nor control his feelings of sexual entitlement.

This continued attempt to laud his love-making knowledge changes dramatically again in the final six lines. Again, her response has forced his rhetoric to take a different direction; unfortunately, he can only return to the concrete example of his own nakedness. There is little subtlety here:

Then since I may know,
 As lib'rally to a midwife show
 Thyself! Cast all, yea, this white linen hence:
 There is no penance, much less innocence!
 To teach thee, I am naked first: Why than,

What needs thou have more cov'ring than a man? (43-48)

These lines provide an insight into the unsettled seducer. And we are reminded of his ludicrous situation: she still wears her "white linen"; all his verbal niceties have not yet succeeded in having her naked. His attempts to unclothe her continue, but now with an insult; his control here is slipping more than are her garments. What he reveals is how a socially inferior young man feels when he is attempting to seduce a more experienced woman, and what verbal games such a young man is prepared to play. His final argument (using the last gasp of the more informal, poetic "thou") is to suggest a passion of animalistic sexuality in the ambiguity of the last line:

What needs thou have more cov'ring than a man? (48)

He is offering her the equality of nakedness, and the raw passion a stallion might show to a mare.⁶⁴ All he is left with at the end is the misogynistic attitude with which he began the poem.

This voice Donne has let loose here is carefully constructed: the tonal shifts, the verbs that are a call to action, the breathless vowels, the purposely ambiguous imagery all create a rounder character than he presents in the venal bracelet recipient. The love aspirant's voice is more real, his final confusion more palpable. Any argument that ends in a question invites a dangerous answer. The coterie is positioned to assess the possibilities. She has the power here and may well decide

⁶⁴ The OED first cites "covering", in the sense of horses coupling, in 1552. See "covering," 1. Also note Robbins, *Poems*, n. 48, 331. Donne uses the same idea of equine sexuality in the last two lines of "Love's Pupil."

not to remove her final garment. As with "The Flea," the sophistry may be clever but the final decision as to whether to play the game, belongs to the woman.⁶⁵ It is her voice that continues to engage the reader beyond the speaker's final, inadequate question, and it is up to the reader to imagine her final response: how delicious for him if he is accepted, but how much more fun for the reader if his cleverness is found wanting, a detumescent moment for the coterie to chuckle about. Dayton Haskin sees women as more than just subjects in Donne's poetry, but as audience participants too.⁶⁶ It is her imagined voice against which the speaker measures himself, her voice that provides the opportunity for the coterie to consider their own values. As with "The Bracelet," this is a picture of society captured. With "Love's Pupil," Donne goes further, and posits the need for something beyond rhetorical technique.

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"Love's Pupil" (also known as "Tutelage") begins with a tentative move towards a finer understanding of love, but by the end of the poem, the speaker reverts to a familiar, thoughtless misogyny. However, "Love's Pupil" adds to the complexity of Donne's explorations of love. In these anticipations of a finer love, and in his recognition of what independence a woman can achieve if she controls her own voice, Donne moves towards what will prove to be his central poetic concern. If a heart-felt love is to be achieved and sustained, if a genuine love of

⁶⁵ "The Flea," in Robbins, *Poems*, 188-191.

⁶⁶ Dayton Haskin, "The Love Lyric (Songs and Sonets)," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. J. Shami et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 191-2.

criticism. The criticism of each of them is tempered, to allow for further reconciliation. Fools can be important and highly valued. The lovers have been balanced in the syntax: he is "idiot, I," and she is "Fool, thou."⁶⁷ Not all critics see that behind the balanced syntax, lies an awareness of the need for more balanced relationships. Roma Gill, for example, feels that in order "to find in the poem the complexity of the relationship and feeling that is usual in the Latin elegy, it is necessary to agree that the 'lay Ideot' is a married woman."⁶⁸ But seeing the speaker as the self-delusional "lay idiot" particularly accords with the position in which Donne has placed both speakers in the previous elegies I have looked at. Lois E. Bueler argues forcefully for "lay idiot" to refer to the speaker of the poem; both lovers have something to learn.⁶⁹

He begins by revisiting the skills he has taught her, his decoding for her of the "mystic language" of love, the physical movement of eyes and hands, the interpretation of non-verbal "sighs." He has taught her "the alphabet/ Of flowers," the little surprise generated in the blooms captured in the enjambment:

I had not taught thee then the alphabet

Of flow'rs, how devicefully⁷⁰ being set

⁶⁷ Donne uses similar syntax to separate the relative worth of two lovers in "Sappho":

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two
But so as thine from one another do,
And, oh, no more. (45-47)

He continues to use personal pronouns to distinguish the relativities of love in the later sonnet, "Batter my heart":

Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste except you ravish me. (12-14)

⁶⁸ Roma Gill, "'Musa locosa Mea': Thoughts on the Elegies," in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A. J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), 60.

⁶⁹ Lois E. Bueler also sees the failed self-assessment of the speaker to be more Ciceronian than Ovidian. Lois E. Bueler, "The Failure of Sophistry in Donne's Elegy VII," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985): 71-3, 81.

⁷⁰ This is one of the many examples of Donne being the first to use a particular form of a word or expression. It reflects the care he took to create meaning. See Stringer, *Varorium*, 638.

And bound up, might with speechless secrecy
 Deliver errands mutely and mutually. (9-12)

The flowers speak with an oxymoronic "speechless secrecy" and deliver a message "muteley and mutually," an almost homophonic message that demands a distinction be made between words that sound so similar but have a meaning so different.⁷¹ Such a fine distinction demands the audience pays attention, insists readers and listeners work to create a voice. The flowers are speaking, ventriloquising the lover's intentions, and the reader and listener is positioned to provide the flowery love-words. Again, the poetry captures the distinctions the tutor taught his protégé to make, and the reader becomes part of the lesson.

The love-tutor cannot convey any more than an awareness that something other is needed. He is, despite his earlier intimation, incapable of further learning. The woman as touchstone has prompted a flickering of the possibility of taking a love relationship to a higher level, but he is incapable of leaving limited rhetoric behind. He is solely concerned with his own power over her, and he slips into petulant self-promotion.

In this poem, earlier distinctions of "I" and "thou," give way to an unloving question of control, and add reality to the characters' existence. She is now simply property, either "his" or "mine." Her husband has selected her from "th'world's common," only to keep her for himself.⁷² Helen Gardner's claim that the girl is

⁷¹ From a very practical view, knowledge of clandestine signs of communication was essential in Donne's day. Donne's mother passed secret letters between William Weston, a Jesuit, and her brother Jasper Haywood who was imprisoned in the Tower of London. See Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 15.

⁷² Gardner, *Donne*, 126. William Empson also disagrees with Gardiner in this regard, though his claim that Donne was simply "giving the girls a leg up in the world" seems too loose a use of language. William Empson, "Rescuing Donne," in *Just So Much Honor: Essays Commemorating the Four-*

unmarried denies the poem the import of the three stages of agricultural imagery that follow. The imagery is agricultural and degrading. She is at first married and untilled, then is "inlaid" and enclosed, and finally is made into a paradise. This is a microcosmic image of the enclosure movement that was so contentious in the 1590s, and an example of Donne yet again viewing and exploring the love world in secular and economic, rather than Petrarchan terms.

The speaker is much more manipulative than the husband: he is using language designed to change her mind, imagery and connotation to counteract the knowledge she now possesses. His great fear is that she will use the freedom his tutelage has provided, and choose to decide for herself. To control one's voice is to control one's destiny. The earlier concern in the poem, to move towards a finer understanding of what is "mystic" about love, to search for something that will sustain their love beyond the merely physical, degenerates into:

Which oh, shall strangers taste? Must I alas
 Frame and enamel plate, and drink in glass? (27-28)

He retreats to the sexual punning on "oh" and "I" and a Tibullian fear that others will enjoy her.⁷³ Donne has not solved the problem of how to achieve a loving equilibrium here, but he has portrayed the power of the female voice and the poem, after all, is early in his oeuvre.⁷⁴ The speaker has tried every rhetorical trick he can think of to have her return to him but, his coterie readership may well

Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of John Donne, ed. Peter Amadeus Fiore (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 118.

⁷³ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, ii, 109-124. Tibullus 1.6 contains such lines as: "I taught her myself, poor fool, how to delude her guards/ alas! now my own skill has proved my ruin!" (9-10). Quoted in John Corelis, *Erotic Elegy: Selections from Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid and Sulpicia* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1995), 67.

⁷⁴ Robbins dates the poem 1593-6. Robbins, *Poems*, 317.

suspect, to no avail. The woman has been given the language to speak, the understanding to enjoy, and she will not be contained. The speaker at the end tries rhetorical questions in vain, but the images are nasty and aimed to deny her the freedom she has clearly already found: she is an inanimate "enamel plate," the sealing wax on a letter, waiting to be impregnated,⁷⁵ and a horse to be ridden by others. He can only regress to the very imagery from which his tutelage has set her free. His is the awful realisation that his lover's learning will not stop, and that his creation will be further extended and given new knowledge by a new gardener. He is incapable of going beyond the use of rhetoric as restraint and control, and unable to have a relationship with a woman as an equal. She, rightly, demands more than he can provide.

This fear of an independent women is a lens through which the speaker views the world. The most vicious swipe he can have at her is to change her sex in the last line. And ironically, he is right: knowledge and control of language has made her the equivalent of any male; indeed here, his better. Any attempt to undo the lessons he has taught her cannot be achieved by simply changing the personal pronoun. He cannot remove the advantages he has bestowed. He too is a construct of verbal facility and rhetorical awareness, but when the rhetoric is stripped away, all that remains is the unedifying desire to force one's will upon another. Donne positions the reader to be both critical and imaginative. Iser shows what such a positioning means when he argues that the fictive is "an operational mode of consciousness that makes inroads into existing versions of the world."⁷⁶ By placing the woman against the backdrop of a changing agricultural world, an observable

⁷⁵ So many of Donne's early poems presage the ideas his later poems will develop — "seals" will be seen more broadly in "The Relic." See Robbins, *Poems*, 239-243.

⁷⁶ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, xiv.

change, Donne invites the reader to contemplate what other changes might be possible. This woman possesses the clear capacity to continue to grow in her own right. She is as aware as any astute reader, able to assess rhetorical manipulation, and strong enough to reject it. She has dismissed both a boorish husband and an unimpressive lover, and both she and the reader are presented with prospects of continued emotional growth. As Iser argues, to enter into the fictive is to cross boundaries, to see both what might lie ahead, and what has been left behind.⁷⁷

There is a real sense of the strength of the woman's voice in "Love's Pupil," a voice that has been born as a consequence of the tutor's teaching. She is not limited by venality, nor by the social circumstances of her sisters, and is well on her way to forging a successful and independent life. She has left her limited and naïve love-world behind, transcended attempts to have her as mere object, and is here a woman most likely to challenge the best the coterie has to offer. Hers is a voice that the male cannot stop. It is a voice that prompts the male to consider what a loving union might look like, if only he is capable of making the journey.

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The spaces into which Donne has led his readers have so far been quite benign. It takes little extra effort to see that the cost of privileging money may well be to lose the capacity to appreciate love, or that an overblown rhetorical seduction might result in acute final embarrassment. The dramatic experience

⁷⁷ Ibid., xiv-xv.

might be more testing when the reader is asked to contemplate what, other than rhetorical control, might make love last. But the world into which the reader is brought can also be particularly confronting, especially if he or she is positioned by a prospect significantly alien to the norm. In "The Comparison" both the speaker's voice and Donne's voice are more closely aligned. The role that women play here, as touchstones that demand changed male behaviour, is taken to a new level. Female voices are ventriloquised by the male, but the speaker's purpose is not to deny these voices; it is rather to have them sound out clearly. The final comparison with which we are left is not between two women, but between a restrictive societal view of the feminine, and an imagining of what a woman could be.

Guibbory recognises that the differences between the two women "come to seem more those of perception or description (that is, verbal and imaginative constructs) than of 'objective' material reality."⁷⁸ She was also one of the first to suggest that "perhaps the two mistresses described in the poem are not different women, but rather a single woman seen two ways."⁷⁹ Gregory Machacek feels this is the central concern of the poem. He concludes that, " ... the very point of the poem is to compel in readers a belated recognition that the speaker and the addressee love the same woman."⁸⁰ I feel the main point of the poem lies elsewhere. Donne is certainly concerned with verbal and imaginative concepts, but he also suggests that women should not be treated as a job lot, and be subject only to superficial assessment. Guibbory concludes that this poem is an attempt by Donne to reassert male supremacy.⁸¹ However, Donne's use of voice rather

⁷⁸ Achsah Guibbory, "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So': The Politics of Love in Donne's Elegies," *English Literary History*, 57: 4 (Winter, 1990): 816.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 817.

⁸⁰ Gregory Machacek, "Donne's Elegy 8: The Comparison," *Explicator* 59: 2 (Winter, 2001): 71.

⁸¹ Guibbory, "Oh, Let", 823.

suggests the male has to adopt a different view. Katrin Ettenhuber notes that "The Comparison" is an exploration of rhetorical boundaries.⁸² Indeed, the reader is particularly positioned to see the foolishness of pursuing rhetorical excess over a more equable love.

In "The Comparison," Donne's voice resounds within the speaker's certainty. It is the most powerful and personal poetic voice of any of the poems this thesis has so far considered. And having found this voice, he tests it to the limit. The opening lines of the poem have the reader teetering, precariously balanced, challenged as to how to assess the unfolding words. The "sweet sweat of roses" mixes the pleasant and unpleasant, and the second line offers no clarity as to which way the poem might develop, juxtaposing the idea of "chafed musk-cats' pores" with "trill." The very image of the musk-cat contains within it the same uncertainty and tension; the musk-cat smell is appalling, yet the result of adapting and dealing with it knowingly, transforms the appalling into exotic and splendid perfume.⁸³ The opposites continue to be held in abeyance with the connotations of "the almighty balm of th'early East" revealed to be "sweat drops on my mistress' breast." It is not until lines five and six that the reader can say that the opening description of the speaker's lover might be positive:

And on her neck, her skin, such lustre sets,

They seem no sweat drops, but pearl carcanets. (5-6)

⁸² Katrin Ettenhuber, "'Comparisons Are Odious'? Revisiting the Metaphysical Conceit in Donne," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 62: 255 (2010): 398.

⁸³ There has been some discussion as to whether this word should be "muscat" as in the grape, but as Robbins points out, chaffing grapes is unlikely to produce aromatic droplets. Robbins, *Poems*, 300-1. See John T. Shawcross, (ed.) *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor Seventeenth-Century Series, Doubleday, 1971), 47, for an opposing view.

The repetition of "sweat drops" suggests that the speaker's lover has the power to transform sweat drops into pearls. The reader has to be alert to the distinction between "sweat" and "sweaty." Just as Donne had made the reader in "Love's Pupil" grapple with the difference between the almost homonymic "mutely" and "mutually," so here the reader slides into a description of the friend's unfavoured mistress, and goes from "sweat drops" to "sweaty" to "scum." The outrageous image of this mistress' sweat being "Like sperm'tic issue of ripe menstr'ous boils" challenges the reader's continued involvement. Donne tries to have his audience more readily accept his outrageous similes by relating them to the factual, to the siege of Sanserra:

Enforced, Sanserra's starved men did draw
 From parboiled shoes and boots, and all the rest
 Which were with any sovereign fatness blest;
 And like vile, lying stones in saffron tin,
 Or wart or weals they hang upon her skin. (10-14)

The image of the stones made to look like gold (tin was beaten as thin as paper, wrapped about the stones and coloured with saffron in order to deceive) suggests that the coterie needs to look beneath the surface for the truth.⁸⁴ He moves beyond the more simple societal pictures of earlier elegies, and immerses the reader in an unpleasant world. Donne is making the audience work hard; they need to rely on distinguishing the personal pronouns — good (or rather less unpleasant)

⁸⁴ Robbins, *Poems*, n. 13, 302.

descriptions are related to "my," more unpleasant descriptions to "thy." In the following lines, Donne appeals to the audience's classical knowledge, but the personal pronoun "her" is challenging. Where, in line 14 "her" refers to the more unfavourable mistress, in line 15 it relates to the more favoured:

Round as the world's her head, on every side,
 Like to that fatal ball which fell on Ide,
 Or that whereof God had such jealousy,
 As, for the ravishing thereof we die. (15-18)

When Donne requires the reader to weigh up the meaning of this personal pronoun, he creates tension. And the tension builds. Because "The Comparison" is a succession of similes, "like" is an important word. When it is used to introduce both the less and the more favoured mistress, the reader is positioned to apportion comparisons. Indeed, the reader has to hear the words; when the "her" in line 22 refers to his friend's mistress, and the "her" in line 24 refers to his own mistress, tone becomes important. A different tone, depending on which woman was being described, would help clarify the situation: a lighter, more felicitous tone when the description applied to the persona's mistress, a deeper, darker tone when to the other woman. At every level, Donne brings the audience into the poem:

Like the first chaos or flat-seeming face
 Of Cynthia when th'earth's shadows her embrace.
 Like Proserpine's white beauty-keeping chest,
 Or Jove's best fortune's urn, is her fair breast: (21-24)

Even in the lines "favouring" his mistress, the speaker's use of classical references suggests that there is difficulty in something being completely perfect. While it is good that Proserpine's chest is so lovely, she was the queen of Hades, and what she sent back in that chest for Venus was not a day's worth of beauty. It was, rather, what E. K. Chambers describes as "an infernal, deadly sleep."⁸⁵ To liken one of her fair breasts to "Jove's best fortune's urn" (24) is to remind us that Jove's other urn (her other breast?) contained evil. Donne continues to provide evidence of the impossibility of holding extreme positions. He is also implying that love may involve accepting a truth rather than a stereotype, and that it is the knowledgeable lover who can accommodate individual female worth. The poem returns to a description of the most unfavoured mistress, and again the audience is encouraged to look beneath the appearance with "grave, that's dirt without and stench within." The reader is positioned to make meaning. The poem reverts to particularly nasty descriptions of the less favoured mistress. Criticism is directed not only at the woman's genitals, but also, as C. A. Patrides has noted, at her lover:⁸⁶

Are not your kissings then as filthy and more
As a worm sucking an envenomed sore? (43-44)

The critical nature of the poem touches the men, too. Most importantly, Donne is now educating, rather than simply amusing and titillating the coterie. Unlike the

⁸⁵ As quoted in Stringer, *Varorium*, (23), 560.

⁸⁶ C. A. Patrides, ed. *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* (London: Dent, 1985), 26. Elizabeth Bobo has also noted criticism of the male here. Her view that "limbeck" in line 36 is a more appropriate metaphor for the phallus, opens up further possibilities for the reader to explore. Elizabeth Bobo, "'Chafed Muscatts Pores': The Not-So-Good Mistress in Donne's 'The Comparison,'" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 25: 3 (July, 2012): 170.

rejected lover in "Love's Pupil," some in the coterie may possess the depth needed to be able to pay the price a truly "mutual" and "mystic" love demands. The barren nature of merely lustful love that Donne will refer to in "Sappho to Philaenis" as "the tillage of a harsh, rough man"⁸⁷ is predated here in the agricultural assessment of the young man's sexual technique:

Is not your last act harsh and violent
As when a plough a stony ground doth rent? (47-48)

Such questions beg to be answered, and Donne dramatically points the audience towards the possibilities. The change in the very next line is marked. Here is a very different prospect to contemplate:

So kiss good turtles, so devoutly nice
Are priests in handling rev'rent sacrifice,
And such in searching wounds the surgeon is
As we when we embrace or touch or kiss.
Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus:
She and comparisons are odious.⁸⁸ (49-54)

The image of a love as tender as a surgeon probing a wound is wittily honest. Like the image of beaten gold in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," it accepts love may not be painless or easy. The projection of a strong physical love in pure and

⁸⁷ "Sappho to Philaenis" in Robbins, *Poems*, (38), 932.

⁸⁸ This is a zeugma, one part of speech (here, the verb "are") that governs two parts of the sentence, "She" and "comparisons." See Ettenhuber, "Comparisons," 398.

spiritual terms, so evident in later poetry, emerges here not as a simple rhetorical exercise, but as a more serious prospect than in any of the elegies looked at so far. The sexual act that incorporates genuine respect and love and that goes beyond agricultural and mechanical lust is "a reverent sacrifice." Kisses in these final lines are symbols of innocent and perfect love, a vehicle for mingling souls. There is no uncertainty with the pronouns now; all four lovers are on the stage, embraced in the repeated "we." The "her" the speaker asks his friend to leave is the false conception that this friend has constructed of his mistress. What the speaker has been doing throughout the poem is combating the false images the friend has of his lover with even more outlandish and unsustainable images of his own; more than rhetorical conceptions of women are needed if a genuine love is to be pursued. The friend's created mistress, the "She" of the last line, is as odious as have been all the rhetorical comparisons proffered in the poem. It is time both men went in another direction. Donne, unlike the love-tutor in "Love's Pupil," is prepared to explore his own limitations, as well as to educate those who read and hear him; Donne is poetically exploring prospects that may lead to a delightfully more challenging love. He is exemplifying Iser's observation that the fictive both disrupts and doubles the referential world.⁸⁹

Again, as in the previous elegies, it is the woman who has the upper hand; the impact she has on the speaker attests to her strength. The speaker has not only been addressing his friend, but as the repeated "we" suggests, also the two mistresses. The speaker has been addressing quite specific questions: that a woman might demand to have more attention paid to her than the merely superficial, demand that any man worthy of her would look beneath the surface,

⁸⁹ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, xv.

the initial appearance, and might question his own obsessive behaviour and perhaps develop a sexual expertise that goes beyond the rough mechanical. She understands that love may be difficult and painful, that the care and softness of a probing surgeon may not extinguish all discomfort. However, if lovers join themselves in the plural "we," and are prepared to sacrifice their individual selves to form a new joint entity (as the priests pursuing a reverent sacrifice), then the physical may engender a holy and pure state. As Iser notes, "literary fictions decompose existing organizations outside the text, and recompose them in order to overstep given boundaries."⁹⁰ The speaker's lover's concerns have been ventriloquised through the very unpleasant descriptions the speaker posits: women are likely to find any man who can address such questions much more to their liking.

It is not the restoration of male power Donne explores, rather a renegotiation of relationships. In every poem so far considered, it is both the real and the imagined woman's voice that has been strong enough to challenge male behaviour. Misogyny is undercut by the failure of the male speakers, or as here, by the revulsion that misogyny engenders. Donne presents women as touchstones strong enough to reveal male deficiencies. At a time when a female monarch reigned and gender roles were a point of considerable tension, the elegiac genre was a particularly apt space in which to explore the voices of the time. In "The Comparison," the speaker's address to his fellow swain answers a female voice the speaker appears to have heard before, and here demands a new attitude to love. Certainly, Donne has wrapped his own voice around a well-worn proverb,

⁹⁰ Wolfgang Iser, "What is Literary Anthropology? The Difference between Explanatory and Exploratory Fictions," in *Revenge of the Aesthetic*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 171.

"comparisons are odious," and has imbued it with new life, created a catch-cry that can provide the basis by which to reassess what love might be.⁹¹ Stanley Fish says this final line expresses Donne's revulsion, not from the ugly woman he has created, but from "the act by which he makes them."⁹² This idea can be developed. For Donne, there is a land of love that is other than stony ground, and is created by the voices that duel and interact in his poems.

The next stage Donne fills with characters will be much more experimental. It will have to be. When he meets Anne More, he will have to offer her a role to play that she cannot decline.

⁹¹ Gardner notes that the phrase "comparisons are odious" goes back at least to the fifteenth century. Gardner, *Donne*, 121.

⁹² Stanley Fish, "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 226-227.

Chapter Three

More is needed.

"Sappho to Philaenis" is a very different elegy. Here, voices are pared right back and feelings dominate, and love as pure and balanced as might be imagined is given centre stage. The imaginary is very important; it allows Donne to go where none had gone before. Carey claims this is "the first female homosexual poem in English." He also argues that the central point of the poem is not to explore lesbianism as such, but rather to explore "a union of lovers so complete that the two identities, being identical, sink into one."⁹³ The voice that comes out most powerfully in this poem is, unlike previous elegies, not the voice of the female other. It is the voice of Donne as female — it is *his* loss and longing we hear, his "otherness." He is the one who needs to get back to her, needs to be at one with her. In adopting the female role as Sappho, Donne is going further than cross-dressing characters on any Elizabethan stage.

⁹³ Carey, *Life*, 270-271

Iser argues that it is the interplay of the fictive and the imaginary that produces literature, and that the imaginary is brought into play from outside of itself.⁹⁴ It is activated and stimulated by forces beyond itself, here by Ovid's "Sappho to Phaon," as palimpsest. By eschewing his gender and poetic prowess, Donne forces the reader to also extend her/his conception of what might be possible. What Donne offers Anne is the most unsettling prospect he can conjure up, a journey in which he challenges her to participate. At first glance "Sappho to Philaenis" may seem to sit outside Donne's oeuvre; upon closer inspection, it represents every aspect of his poetic concerns.⁹⁵ There has been considerable discussion about the position of this poem in the canon of Donne's poetry, with both Gardner⁹⁶ and Marotti⁹⁷ relegating it to *dubia*. Robbins also questions the poem's authorship, noting it lacks "poetic sophistication and sharp-minded wit."⁹⁸ "Sappho to Philaenis" is different, and this is the point. Donne explores a special world, and most compellingly concludes the poem in an outpouring of feeling that presages the emotional sense of loss in the final punning anguish of "To Christ." Harvey puts such discussion in perspective when she notes attempts to exclude the poem from Donne's canon are based "more on moral objections than textual evidence, since its presence in numerous manuscripts that purport to be collections of his poetry and in the first edition of Donne's poems would seem to

⁹⁴ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, xvii.

⁹⁵ For an interesting view of early modern depictions of Sappho, and especially John Lyly's *Sappho and Phao* that was performed for Elizabeth I, see C. Annette Grise, "Depicting lesbian desire: contexts for John Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis,'" *Mosaic*, Winnipeg, 29:4 (Dec. 1996): 41-58. Her article is more interested in placing Donne's poem in the wider context of early modern approaches to lesbianism, rather than to Donne's personal situation.

⁹⁶ Gardner, *Donne*, xlvi.

⁹⁷ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 18.

⁹⁸ Robbins, *Poems*, 929.

support its authenticity."⁹⁹ For Donne, his poetic progress has now become personal.

This idea of relating a specific poem by Donne to a specific person or event is problematic. But there are certain poems where the poetry itself suggests a particular poetic inspiration, where Donne plays with names so strongly, as he does in "Sappho to Phileanis," that the personal cannot be ignored. There is a more nuanced role to consider for Anne More, other than one that suggests her total unimportance on the one hand, or trying to prove that each poem has a biographical inspiration behind it on the other. The role Anne played in the development of Donne's oeuvre has generally been overlooked.¹⁰⁰ Carey, without evidence, suggests Anne was "virtually uneducated," and that to be an intellectual match for Donne she would have had to be "a walking encyclopedia."¹⁰¹ But perhaps few, regardless of gender, might have matched Donne's breadth of knowledge. Walton notes that Anne was "curiously and plentifully educated."¹⁰² Ilona Bell persuasively argues Donne and Anne may have exchanged letters after they were separated in 1600; if so, Anne was clearly astute enough to appreciate a written missive.¹⁰³ That he loved Anne enough to jeopardize his future for her, is undisputed. That their relationship embraced twelve children, and that he was deeply saddened by her death and, unusually for the time, did not remarry, is clear. Stubbs, in the most recent biography of Donne, notes Anne "was in on the jokes, not their victim," and comments that her "curious" education suggests "she had a

⁹⁹ Harvey, *Voices*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Even the spelling of Anne's name is uncertain. There is no extant example of her signature, but she shared her mother's first name, and that was spelt with an "e," so there is some logic here. See M. Thomas Hester, ed. *John Donne's "desire of more": The subject of Anne More Donne in His Poetry*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 12-13.

¹⁰¹ Carey, *Life*, 74.

¹⁰² See D. Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 476. Also see Flynn, "Donne's Education," in *Oxford Handbook*, 408-423.

¹⁰³ Ilona Bell, "Women in Donne's poems", 210.

plentiful knowledge of the texts and abstruse moral issues that formed the basis of a male-dominated liberal education — from which women were generally excluded."¹⁰⁴ Hester, in perhaps the most definitive word on Anne to date, notes that she was "learned," and that her husband learned her by heart: indeed, that they knew every line of each other.¹⁰⁵ Donne thought his wife was educated; he took pains to note on her tombstone that she was "well-read."¹⁰⁶

Clearly, "Sappho to Philaenis" does not hide its fictionality. By placing the reader on such a stage, the reader is forced to consider what else is possible beyond the obvious fiction. If Donne is divesting himself of his gender and poetic abilities, then what is left is a love at the extremities of possibility, a love beyond gender limitations. He will more fully explore this in the later "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," in the witty reversal of "thy firmness" and "my circle," but in this earlier poem Donne's poetic control fails him and at the end he concludes with simplistic rhyme and trite expression. What he does create is an imagined love beyond the power of words to capture. He opens a space for readers (and especially Anne) to enter and play in, if they are game enough to step so far away from what they know. Iser argues spaces are stages on which both reader and writer can play. The fictionality that attends these spaces, he notes, allows humans to "simultaneously be in the midst of life and to overstep it," to "step outside the contexts that normally define what we are."¹⁰⁷ Through the passion that the love between two women allows, Donne presents to Anne the depth of longing he

¹⁰⁴ Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Hester, *Desire More*, 20-21. Donne's introductory note to Sir Robert Carr, written in March, 1625, in which he states "I did best when I had least truth for my subject" appears to relate to a political need to distance himself from any inadvertent comments he may have previously made, rather than being a serious reflection on what may have stimulated the writing of previous love poetry. See Robbins, *Poems*, 799-801.

¹⁰⁶ M. Thomas Hester, "'miserrimum dictu': Donne's epitaph for his wife," *The Journal of English and German Philology* 94:4 (1995): 513-517.

¹⁰⁷ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 83-4.

suffers, a depth beyond the limitations his gender provides. If Bell is right in her dating of this poem (and there is ample evidence in the poem to support her claims), then the impact of the personal adds a new dimension to the understanding of Donne's poetry.¹⁰⁸ He creates voices and captures societal mores. He places his audience in a position where they might reassess their own relationships. And he inhabits a previously created persona, Sappho, and uses her as a vehicle whereby he can also explore his own position in a new love-world.¹⁰⁹ He makes the one set of words do two things: beneath a particularly witty reworking of the original work is a deep declaration of longing for Anne. The desired union with Anne will not only be Donne's "all," but even more excitingly, his "more."

Here the male becomes the woman. Now the touchstone is not simply the idea of what a woman might be, but rather the concept of a balanced, mutual love. With "Sappho," Donne experiments most dangerously. Forbidden to be with Anne, he uses elegiac form and Ovidian suggestion to explore a love so pure that voice might be unnecessary and feelings can replace all. He uses the genre of female complaint poetry: he has to be bereft and lose his poetic ability, and be ineffectual at the end of the poem. Within these severe limitations, he imagines a love unlike any other, a love between two women. In the guise of Sappho he reaches out for Anne, and the imagined voice we hear in the earlier elegies resounds here too, but in a much different form. Sappho's words are double-edged: the voice that comes from Sappho's lips may represent the final failure of the persona Donne adopts; the

¹⁰⁸ For more on the dating of "Sappho to Philaenis," see footnote 119.

¹⁰⁹ For more on the role of the palimpsest in the evolution of semantic meanings, see Roland Greene, *Five Words: Literary Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013.

voice that is Donne's reinforces his love for Anne, and the final message is that nothing matters other than their love.

The poem opens with the speaker bereft, the traditional posture of the female complaint persona. Her poetic power has gone ("that holy fire which verse is said/ To have"). This poetic force is "enchanted" and misleading, and we see the binary conflict between verse and nature. Verse cannot capture nature's best work, Philaenis. Here is *adynaton*, the inability of hyperbole to express a feeling or thought. This space beyond rhetoric into which the reader is invited, brings us to the edge of Donne's language. Indeed, it demands we go further, and supply our own concept of such worth. Yet if the holy fire of verse is quenched, desire is not. The opening stanza (1-8) attacks the power of poetry, and denigrates the very quality that sets Donne apart from his peers. Donne, as Sappho, is putting himself in a most vulnerable position. Sappho's thoughts are "creatures" that exist beyond the capacity of poetry to contain, and are all the more wild and primitive and sexual for this appellation. Sappho's thoughts are the fires that remain "undecayed" and "unquenched," and these unite with Philaenis to create a new "whole." Importantly, this new entity is not a tribade, but one without a penis, or a penis substitute.¹¹⁰ Donne creates a relationship that uses what women possess, something truly equal that will not need to be poetically played with, to

¹¹⁰ A tribade is a lesbian who particularly uses a phallic substitute in her sexual encounters. See Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 218-219. Donne goes beyond the idea that there has to be a male "replacement" in any sexual encounter between women. He is looking at two "femmes," rather than a tribade with a compliant submissive. See Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chps. 2 and 5. Harriette Andreadis notes the tribade is "persistently associated" with clitoral hypertrophy, but is not defined by it. See Harriet Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550-1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), n. 6, 178.

contemplate an everlasting love.¹¹¹ We are in a space few (if any) in the early modern English period, had entered before.

When Sappho bemoans she is "robbed of picture, heart and sense" (12) she is solidly in the tradition of the voice of the rejected women of the *Heroides*. But Donne's Sappho has been robbed of something else. Ovid's Sappho may have lost her beloved Phao but she still retains her poetic command.¹¹² Donne's Sappho loses it. Donne refashions Ovid's Sappho in a mirror reversal, leaves her bereft of poetic powers and reinstates her uncompromising love of women.¹¹³ Emotions of raw feeling and love replace the poetic voice. The memory Donne's Sappho has of Philaenis is "irksome." (13) Here is the feeling, rather than the voice, and negative capability haunts the bereft lover. She can neither bear to keep it, nor let it go. It is not any poetic ability, but rather unsettled love that "tells" Sappho how "fair" (15) is her Philaenis. It is the love that is personified, and speaks here. If Donne's well-touted "masculinity" is taken away, and his poetic ability is taken away, all that is left is the love. This is the point of the poem. Donne is experimenting with the Ovidian model and producing a twist to the original. He is also, as the punning references to Anne More's surname will later attest, directing the poem at her, exploring the possibilities of an all-consuming devotion.

Having lost her poetic voice in the first stanza, Sappho nevertheless tries to "capture" Philaenis in a simile:

¹¹¹ The male/female construct was just that — constructed. "... the modern system of binary sexual identities that was to establish heterosexuality and homosexuality as separate and mutually exclusive identities did not become a dominant ideology until sometime during the eighteenth century." *Ibid.*, xi.

¹¹² Though Ovid's Sappho notes "My constant Tears the Paper stain/My hand can scarce direct my Pen," her attempt to emotionally blackmail Phao is more powerful than Sappho's final remarks in Donne's poem. See Ovid, *Heroides and Amores* Grant Showerman trans. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), *Heroides 15*, (122-123).

¹¹³ This is another reflection that exists between Sappho and Philaenis. In an ironic twist, Philaenis was also a writer of erotic poetry. See Harvey, *Voices*, n.15, 155.

th'art so fair

As gods, when gods to thee I do compare,

Are graced thereby; and to make blind men see

What things gods are, I say they're like to thee. (15-18)

Sappho is searching for words to use beyond such general imagery. Petrarchan poetics are rejected and replaced by the essence of a self that resides in another:

But thy right hand and cheek and eye only

Are like thy other hand and cheek and eye. (23-24)

Donne, as Sappho, has embraced the female role and is intent on entering a love-world with her female partner. In this new world, both will have to play new roles. Poetry is again incapable of capturing Philaenis' beauty and worth. The poetic expectations of similes and hyperboles have disappeared; Philaenis is simply herself, simply "is."

The balance of two bodies is captured in the simple repetition of hands and cheeks and eyes. But the balance is uncertain; the earlier image of Philaenis as "wax" surrounded by "fires" (10) suggests equality is uncertain. "Here" is Sappho's unsatisfying world without Philaenis, a world where "lover's swear in their idolatry," where a lesser love might last for a while, but will ultimately prove transient. Even a truly balanced love, captured in a feminine rhyme, without phallus, without poetic trickery, may not last. In the most balanced of possible worlds, is still the fear of inconstancy:

Such was my Phao awhile, but shall be never
 As thou wast, art and, oh, mayst be for ever. (25-26)

Rejecting poetical "style," Sappho can only say in the simplest of language that she must reflect Philaenis, and not be different from her in that reflection. The deliberately poor verse, strained rhythm and end rhyme reveal the inadequacy of poetry to capture such love. The poet's subject, the reader and the poet her/himself are again asked to contemplate a space beyond words. True love is in the exact reflection. Sappho cannot be sad, and look sad, at this separation from Philaenis, or they will not be the same. This love must be balanced and equal.

Donne (as Sappho) contemplates the possibility of Philaenis' love with a young boy, but nature here declares there can be no constancy. The youth will evolve into a brutish, uncaring male; his imagined rapacious approach is captured in the sexual image, "tillage." The question poses a specific concern:

Plays some soft boy with thee? Oh there wants yet
 A mutual feeling which should sweeten it.
 His chin a thorny-hairy unevenness
 Doth threaten, and some daily change possess.
 Thy body is a natural Paradise,
 In whose self, unmanured¹¹⁴, all pleasure lies,
 Nor needs perfection: why shouldst thou then
 Admit the tillage of a harsh, rough man? (31-38)

¹¹⁴ Donne had used "manure" in the verse letter "To Sir Rowland Woodward," perhaps written in 1597. See Robbins, *Poetry*, 56. Here, Donne suggests Woodward "manure thyself" (34) in the sense that he should work to appreciate his own sense of worth.

It is the "mutual feeling" that can only be encompassed by true equals, by two women who share the centric "Oh."¹¹⁵ Male bodily changes will "threaten," but Philaenis' body is a "natural Paradise."¹¹⁶ The loving union later sought by Donne in the plural pronoun and the androgynous balance that "to one neutral thing both sexes fit"¹¹⁷ is more "natural" when the love is between two women. In a relationship with men, Sappho posits it is all male ownership and production:

Men leave behind them that which their sin shows,
And as are thieves traced which rob when it snows. (39-40)

Men leave behind them traces of semen, and children. Their involvement is not only a "sin," but also lacks subtlety and cleverness; it is as obvious as previous elegiac personae have demonstrated and as obvious and incriminating as footprints in the snow.¹¹⁸ In adopting the female persona, Donne is both showing Anne what he is prepared to give up, and showing her the possibilities of subtlety and cleverness to which she might aspire. Philaenis is a "natural" paradise that does not need a man's presence to fully exist.

¹¹⁵ Donne explores this idea in Elegy 19, "To his Mistress Going to Bed" in "O my America! My new found land!" Robbins, *Poems*, (27), 328.

¹¹⁶ Aphra Behn wrote "To the fair Clarinda, who made love to me, imagined more than a woman," published in 1688. She places Clarinda in a role quite different from Donne's Sappho. Clarinda is apportioned a male role:

Fair lovely maid, or if that title be
Too weak, too feminine for nobler thee,
Permit a name that more approaches truth,
And let me call thee, lovely charming youth.

in Aphra Behn, *The Collected Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers (Digireads.com Publishing, 2011), vol. 6, 263.

¹¹⁷ "The Canonization" in Robbins, *Poems*, (25), 153.

¹¹⁸ The basic argument of the footprints here is as simplistic as that seen in the opening quatrain of "Break of Day," though in "Sappho to Philaenis" the rhythm is more "bumbling" in style. "Break of Day" in Robbins, *Poems*, 141.

Previous elegies have seen women exist in relation to a man; Philaenis does not need to respond to any male to justify or prove her existence. She is an all-encompassing "self," a presence who needs nothing other than what she is and has. Grammatical wit cannot do justice to this lesbian love. Sappho explores the fictive, and adopts the special language of self-reflection; poetic devices give way to a mirror image of each with the other. For Sappho, love between a man and a woman belongs to the disappointing past. There is no replacement penis; Sappho is more than content with female attributes:

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two
 But so as thine from one another do,
 And, oh, no more: the likeness being such
 Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
 Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies:
 Why should they breast to breast, or thighs to thighs? (45-50)

The easeful logic of their coupling is captured in the easy progressive rhythm and simple rhyme. The game is witty. What Donne is offering Anne is a poetic prospect as challenging as their real-life sexual liaisons were proving to be.¹¹⁹ He strips love

¹¹⁹ Robbins dates "Sappho to Philaenis" quite widely — offers 1590s or 1609 (when several signs of awareness of Shakespeare's sonnets are evident). I suspect a date of 1599 or 1600 would better reflect the position of "Sappho to Philaenis" in its treatment of love within Donne's oeuvre. A letter to Donne by Thomas Woodward, in which Woodward assumes the persona of a "tribadree" lover, was included in an exchange of privately circulated letters dated 1592 to 1594. Donne took the idea to more nuanced realms in "Sappho to Philaenis." The Commentary in the Donne Varorium *Elegies* cites Robert Ellrodt's belief that "Sappho was composed before 1601, especially since the heroical epistle, as a genre, flourished between 1597 and 1599." Stringer, *Varorium*, ll. 101-02, 962. Bell certainly sees this as an earlier poem, and that "... Donne may have secretly sent the poem to Anne after her father, hearing of their affair, tried to separate them." See Bell, "Women in Donne's poems", 211. For a more thorough exploration of the dating of "Sappho to Philaenis," see Ilona Bell, "Under Ye Rage of a Hott Sonn and Yr Eyes: John Donne's Love Letters to Anne More" in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. C. Summers and T-L. Peabworth, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 25-52.

to its core, and divests it of gender limitations. And through the simile, he strips poetry of its referential logic. Both women, in their reflected perfection, need nothing more than they have: hands, cheeks, eyes, lips, breasts, thighs. The differences of gender, the differences of age, the differences of rhetorical facility we have seen in previous elegies, disappear for Sappho. For her (for Donne), all that is needed is an equal love, a sameness, a reflection of one in the other. As Donne, he plays with their surnames.¹²⁰ Here is the rhetorical cleverness that rhetorical instruction manuals of the time deemed should appear unforced and unobtrusive. If Donne had given up his "art" to be Sappho, Anne must be a new person too; if she is Philaenis, she can be "no more." (47) They can exist together, merged, perfectly reflected, and their same sex love *can* produce something other than children; it produces an unending love:

Likeness begets such strange self-flattery,
That touching myself, all seems done to thee (51-52)

This punning on his name reinforces awareness that this is Donne acting as Sappho. In touching himself, he is also touching her. In this world beyond the limitations of gender roles, are intimations of masturbation. Sappho has been looking at herself in the mirror and has imagined the reflection to be Philaenis:

Myself I embrace, and mine own hands I kiss,

¹²⁰ This was something Donne was prone to do. He did it cheekily in his "apologetic" letter to Anne's father explaining their elopement, when he wrote "it is irredeemibly donne." He did it in his name carved on her headstone, "Johannes," uniting them both in the proper noun. Anne's surname, More, was to also be a rich source of poetic depth. See Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 162. Ben Saunders claims his analysis of "Sappho to Philaenis" is the first to link punning on both "done" and "more" in a single reading. See Ben Saunders, *Desiring Donne: Poetry, Sexuality, Interpretation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 139.

And amorously thank myself for this.
 Me in my glass, I call thee; but, alas,
 When I would kiss, tears dim my eyes and glass. (53-56)

There is a real sense of loss here. Looking in her mirror Sappho sees herself, but her lover is not really there. It is an aching absence that produces tears — but despite the emotion, Donne has written himself into a corner. One cannot write a paean of praise yet reject the words that are needed to produce such art. Iser notes that while the imagination may elude language, it can never dispose of it, for it is language that creates our reality.¹²¹ Raphael Lyne argues that the poem provides a space for the female voice to oppose Donne's masculinity.¹²² But Bell's observation that the lesbian love here "provides a protective subtext for the lovers themselves" broadens the sense of the poem.¹²³ As Carey has said, "Sappho's homosexuality recommends itself as the answer to an imaginative problem."¹²⁴ The final sense of Donne's possible irreparable loss, the feeling behind the pun on "more" near the end of the poem, needs to be accommodated.

As he often does, Donne reverts to wit to try to solve the unsolvable. What will make Donne feel complete, is Anne. While the voices in this elegy *are* pared back, and Donne does try to replace voice with feelings and emotions, it is Donne's own voice that emerges most strongly here. The game of playing the female complaint poet is coming to an end in the anguished need to be himself, and his

¹²¹ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 11.

¹²² Raphael Lyne, "Intertextuality and the female voice after the Heroides," *Renaissance Studies* 22:3 (2008): 310-315.

¹²³ Bell, "women in Donne's poems," 211.

¹²⁴ Carey, *Life*, 271.

journey back is captured in the personal pronouns on either side of the colon, and in the breathless progression between the commas:

O cure this loving madness, and restore
 Me to me: thee, my half, my all, my more. (57-58)

For Donne, a love without male-female differences is impossible. He is prepared to discard the penis and ventriloquise Sappho, but even when perfectly reflecting Philaenis in the mirror, the love produced is not enough. Poetic explorations devoid of poetic powers, have broken down. Donne will never again explore the balance that is needed to try to achieve a constant and pure and physical love outside of the traditional trope of androgynous Edenic perfection in a plural pronoun.¹²⁵ What is needed is "my more."¹²⁶

The conclusion seems somewhat anticlimactic, as befits a traditional "female complaint" poem. The progression of "So may ... So May ... And so" is unconvincing; the lines are trite, though there is in the awareness of "envy" in women and "love" in men, a suggestion that will be later taken up to better effect in "The Relic," that "All women shall adore us (and some men)." (19)¹²⁷

So may thy cheeks' red out wear scarlet dye,

¹²⁵ The important extension of this idea occurs in the last stanza of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning." Before they were separated by God, Adam and Eve were an androgynous perfection, both sexes in one. It was the female part of Adam that was removed to create an independent Eve. Most of Donne's lovers are (re)joined in the plural pronouns. This is particularly evident in "The Sun Rising" and "The Canonization." In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," Donne ascribes the male "firmness" to Anne, the female "circle" to himself. Aristophanes had raised a similar, if more humorous, prospect in Plato's *Symposium*. See Donald Levy, "The Definition of Love in Plato's *Symposium*," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40: 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1979): 285-291.

¹²⁶ Donne will write other poems in which he adopts the female voice, eg. "Woman's Constancy" and "Confined Love," but at no other time will he try to so thoroughly adopt the feminine as he does in "Sappho to Philaenis."

¹²⁷ Robbins, *Poems*, 241. He dates "The Relic" 1608-13.

And their white, whiteness of the Galaxy;
 So may thy mighty amazing beauty move
 Envy in all women, and in all men, love (59-62)

Sappho is ensnared in the poetic form, and in the persona of the complaint poet.

The final couplet simply suggests she will feel better if Philaenis returns:

And so be change and sickness far from thee
 As thou by coming near keep'st them from me. (63-64)

This may be a welcome change from Ovid, where Sappho suggests Phao has bequeathed her both heartache and a sexual disease, but it is still an inadequate means of praise for the love Donne and Anne might share.¹²⁸ Donne uses the *Heroides* as a vehicle to both express his love and exhibit his cleverness. He adopts and adapts the trope of female "complaint" poetry and strips himself of gender and poetic worth in an attempt to impress Anne. As Sappho, he creates a special love world that she, as Philaenis, can enter and enjoy. As he will do later with Magdalen Herbert in "The Relic," he gives Anne a role to play; she can be an important poet too, a female of classical (and erotic) worth, Philaenis. Together, they can be merged in each other and form a special union where their love needs nothing other than itself.¹²⁹ The wit of Donne assuming Sappho's place impresses, but the

¹²⁸ Ovid's lines do not anticipate any reunion with Phao:

With the Disease I got from you,
 My Eyes have got the running too. (120-121)

Quoted in John Kerrigan, ed. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint'. A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 271.

¹²⁹ In exploring the aesthetic space the reader inhabits when contemplating such reactions to a text, Krieger has put forward "the notion of the 'shadow text', a mock-text that is invisibly implied by, and subliminally stands like a shadow behind, the poetic text. These shadow texts are generic texts that

love that is created between the lovers will be greater and more impressive in other poems such as "The Sun Rising" and "The Canonization." Donne did not write "Sappho to Philaenis" only as a way to write back to Ovid, and to explore the genre of female complaint poetry; but as a love poem, it lacks the depth of feeling he plumbs elsewhere.

Donne shows in "Sappho to Philaenis" that, despite all efforts, he cannot be other than he is. He tries submerging his voice in that of Sappho, but it cannot work. If Bell is right when she posits that this poem was written for Anne, then we must assume Anne was intelligent and aware enough to understand it, even if Donne had to explain it to her, a task he may well have relished. In terms of voices heard and imagined, this is a significant poem. Donne presents Anne (Philaenis) not as a voice, but as a presence powerful enough to make any attempt to fashion a voice for her, impossible. However, Donne has created other voices: he uses Sappho's voice to explore challenging possibilities of poetic negation and gender fluidity, and his own, and very personal voice, wails its frustration at the end. The voices Donne liberates in "Sappho" are myriad, but without the prospect of success, the poetry is doomed to fail. The main protagonists speak, past poetic voices are rejected, and the physical and implied verbal inadequacies of the "soft boy" are presented. But it is Donne's personal voice that sounds most powerfully. Donne, as Sappho, voices a proposition of love that had never been poetically captured before. Yet even this voice cannot ensure unending constancy. Donne's love is beyond the limitations of the elegiac form to contain, and in this poem, is beyond the abilities of words to mould.

our reading habits and our interpretative discourse infer as we try to probe the mysteries of the text at hand. As readers, our limited language resorts to these shadows, and projects them upon the text in our effort to grasp it, to subdue it to our own terms." Krieger, *My Travels*, 229-230.

It is in the *Songs and Sonnets* where Donne will create a world he and Anne can more realistically inhabit. In the more mature poems here, the measure of the speaker's worth will change from simply being assessed against the presence of a woman, to being judged against the concept of a perfect love and the speaker's ability to attain and maintain it. And voice will become even more important for Donne. It will shape his world.

Chapter Four

A different path: mutuality, and fear.

While he was writing the elegies, Donne was also writing a different collection of poems that would eventually be published, some two years after his death, as *Songs and Sonnets*. After "Sappho to Philaenis," he ceases to use the elegiac form as a genre to explore male-female relations, and only returns to the elegiac form after 1609 when he uses it in a more traditional way, to write to a patroness, to satisfy those who might pay to have idyllic words written about the sadly departed, or to note the passing of a royal prince.¹³⁰ In "The Comparison" and "Sappho," he takes voices in the elegy to the edge of what is possible; in the *Songs and Sonnets*, Donne further develops those voices.

¹³⁰ "Elegy: To the Lady Bedford" (1609), "A Funeral Elegy" (1610) and "Elegy on Prince Henry" (1612-13). The dates are suggested by Robbins, who also notes Grierson's comment relating to Donne's elegies about the deceased, that they "were more frankly addressed not so much to the memory of the dead as to the pocket of the living." Robbins, *Poems*, 731-735; 860-867; 761-773; and Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed. *Donne: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 735.

The second edition of the *Songs and Sonnets*, arguably more "organised" than the first edition that appeared two years earlier, was published in 1635.¹³¹ It begins with "The Flea" and "The Good Morrow," and these are followed by "Go and catch a falling star" and "Woman's Constancy." Such diversity of voice, moving from attempted rhetorical seduction, to the heady flush of new love, to the questioning of gender values, captures the breadth of Donne's concerns with love. This is a more personal voice than the elegiac form allows and, after his marriage, and with his chances of court preferment diminishing, his voice comes more to the fore. It is a voice that becomes less concerned about showing others how they might see the world, and women, and love, and instead becomes a voice that tries to secure its own position. Donne's voice, especially after his marriage, is his conduit for life. It will have to confront an increasing fear, that a pure and unending love is unsustainable.

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If "Sappho" attempted to strip language to its basic core, and let emotion speak for itself, "The Flea," in contrast, revels in wordplay. Again, Donne takes a genre and plays with it; amatory flea poetry here becomes an extended stage on which duelling voices play out, and where actions are seen and imagined. It is the ludic

¹³¹ The sonnet form does not appear in this collection of Donne's poetry. The title may be more a seventeenth century marketing ploy, hoping to emulate the success of Tottel's miscellany, rather than a real depiction of what the collection contains. John T. Shawcross claims the title "Songs and Sonnets" was the creation of a "misguided" editor. John T. Shawcross, "But Is It Donne's? The Problem of Titles on His Poems," *John Donne Journal* 7:2 (1988): 144.

quality of the poem that impresses, the light yet tight voice that nevertheless seems so effortless, the *sprezzatura*. Both subject matter and tone suggest this poem is an early poetic display.¹³² Donne presents a light-hearted blueprint for seduction for the coterie to consider, and if they read or listen closely — *in utramque partem* — they might discern something important on the other side of the argument. Empty spaces in "The Flea" encourage reader involvement. Iser notes the effect empty spaces have. They "dislocate the reader's normal expectations of language, and he finds he must reformulate a formulated text if he is to be able to absorb it."¹³³ They are "a propellant for the reader's imagination, making him supply what has been withheld."¹³⁴ In a coterie world, empty spaces demand to be filled.

"The Flea" begins with the speaker using every rhetorical trick he can think of to seduce the woman. He reduces the speaker's desired goal to an insignificant "that." Even the rhythm occasioned by the rhyming "e" sounds mocks the woman's refusal.

Mark but this flea, and mark in this
 How little that which thou deny'st me is:
 Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
 And in this flea our two bloods mingled be. (1-4)

Donne's voice is heard too, in the awareness of the need for mutuality. This takes the poem beyond the traditional trope of fleas gaining access to the body of the

¹³² Robbins dates "The Flea" as early 1590s. Robbins, *Poems*, 188-191.

¹³³ Iser, *Reading*, 185.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

object of desire, experiencing that which a prospective lover can only imagine. What is most powerful is the prospect of a joint existence, "mingled" inside a small, protective space. The viciousness of "the tillage of a harsh, rough man" Sappho had raised, is replaced by the much softer prospect of mutual sucking.¹³⁵

The voice of the woman is heard, but it is also imagined. We imagine the woman's initial response to the speaker's proposal, and in his specific rejection, we hear part of her response clearly:

Confess it! This cannot be said
 A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead;
 Yet this enjoys before it woo,
 And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
 And this, alas, is more than we would do. (5-9)

Here is his attempt to deny her voice, her specific concerns for loss of purity ("sin"), public reputation ("shame") and personal innocence ("loss of maidenhead"). He replaces her concerns with a light-hearted voice of mock resignation: the image of the throbbing, growing flea is evocative, and we hear his frustrated exhalation in the last line. A return to the peremptory is needed:

Oh stay! Three lives in one flea spare
 Where we almost — nay, more than — married are:

¹³⁵ "Sappho to Phileanis," Robbins, *Poems*, (38), 932.

There has been some discussion of the written form of the letter "s", looking like the letter "f". If Donne did have this in mind, it would change the way the word "sucking" might be received by the woman, and add an extra complication to the poem. See Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), 54.

This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage-bed and marriage-temple is. (10-13)

The speaker's voice here is very different from that heard in the early elegies. But the game is still witty and ongoing, and the woman has to be able to appreciate the changes of scale, from the microscopic flea to the macroscopic concept of religious sanctity:

Though use make thee apt to kill me,
Let not to this self-murder added be,
And sacrilege — three sins in killing three. (16-18)

The opening of the final stanza shows that the woman is not won over by the rhetoric. The speaker's outrageous allusion to the crucifixion has failed to convince her. She not only speaks powerfully in this poem, but also acts decisively. The coterie have been with Donne on this stage of seduction, and they crane forward to see the blood smear. In doing so, they also see the other side of the argument.

Cruel and sudden! Hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence? (19-20)

The speaker appeals directly to her in the concluding lines, asking her to assess the consequences of her actions. Such close engagement goes beyond the petulant behaviour of the cuckolded tutor in "Love's Pupil," and here the love aspirant

accepts her ability to engage in meaningful dialogue. Indeed, he depends upon her ability to reason if his final "rhetorical reversal" is to succeed:

In what could this flea guilty be,
 Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
 Yet thou triumph'st, and says't that thou
 Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now:
 'Tis true: then learn how false fears be:
 Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
 Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee. (21-27)

Donne's speaker in this poem is trying to present an alternative to the stereotypical seduction progress for the woman of surrender, loss of reputation, and final rejection. Rebecca Ann Bach draws attention to the early modern view that if carnality was enjoyable, then it was sinful, "a violation of the order of nature." She notes that "man's relationship with God is primary, that his relationships with men are secondary, and that any sexual engagement with women runs a distant third."¹³⁶ Yet Donne's focus on, and fascination with women, suggests the important role they play in his world. He is not only concerned with seduction, but with the worth of the woman he hopes to seduce. Even in this early demonstration of wit, he sees the woman as a worthy equal, aware of the rhetorical game being played, and capable of participating in it. Donne accords her intellectual worth, strength of speech, and action. She is much more than Peter DeSa Wiggins suggests, simply "a silent young woman reclining in the spaces

¹³⁶ Rebecca Ann Bach, "(Re)placing John Donne in the History of Sexuality," *English Literary History*, 72:1 (2005), 263.

between stanzas."¹³⁷ She is strong enough, as is her counterpart in "To his Mistress Going to Bed," to be in charge at the end; it is her decision as to whether to play the speaker's seduction game, or not, and this delicious possibility lingers beyond the final full stop. In the speaker's awareness of the need for mutuality, the male voice in Donne's poetry is changing. The woman is still the touchstone, but now the male is actively looking for a new role to play in the relationship. The concept of what a woman might be that he had explored in the Elegies, is here an exploration of how a man might respond to a woman whose worth is accepted.

The issues Donne raises in this poem are those that underpin much of his poetry. Physical love may be jocularly portrayed, but it is also seen as spiritually pure: they are "married" and "cloistered" in a "temple," and to decry and end their love would be a "sacrilege." The speaker in "The Flea" is involved in a more nuanced attempt at education than the speaker in "The Comparison." In the elegy, the speaker is simply trying to get his fellow swain to see beyond crass comparisons. In "The Flea," the love aspirant is suggesting a mutuality that fellow swain could not contemplate. What both poems share is an imagining of a more pleasant future, and an awareness that past practices will need to change if that future is to be realised. The mutuality that Donne had explored in "Sappho" could not go beyond a prospect of gender fluidity and the negation of poetry itself. The mutuality in "The Flea," offers a more realistic future prospect for the potential lovers than anything seen in the elegies. Donne's exploration of voices, both male and female, develops much more in the *Songs and Sonnets*. It is the female voice, and the male's awareness of female needs, that grows stronger as Donne's poetic

¹³⁷ Peter DeSa Wiggins, *Donne, Castiglione, and the Poetry of Courtliness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 137.

control matures. Donne's desire for mutuality, and his attendant fear that that it may not overcome all obstacles to an unending love, is his increasing focus.

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The importance a woman might possess and the possibilities a woman might engender are further explored in "Woman's Constancy." Not all see this poem as an important part of Donne's journey towards understanding love. As with most of his poems, the title was probably not provided by Donne. It has simply become an accepted point of reference, and to fail to recognize this may lead to a misreading.¹³⁸ Marotti argues that the poem is a simple libertine lyric that lies beyond "an environment in which ambition and competition reigned."¹³⁹ Stubbs dismisses "Woman's Constancy" quickly, and sees it as a much lesser poem spoken by a male lover.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, if this poem is heard in a male voice, it can be seen as an attempt to reinforce male superiority. Docherty notes:

Alongside the ideological contempt for the female, there runs
 what is perhaps the real rationale for such a suppression of this
 Other; not only a fear of historical death but a fear of woman,
 and a tacit acknowledgment that the female is the source of

¹³⁸ Shawcross, "Titles on His Poems," 148.

¹³⁹ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 79.

¹⁴⁰ Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 185. R. C. Bald also hears the speaker as a man. R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 71.

whatever authority Donne appropriates in his poetic attempts at self construction.¹⁴¹

But it is not Donne's fear of women, or contempt for them, which here seems central to his poetry. The fear is rather that that a finer and more constant love, even when based on mutuality and a melding of genders, may not last.¹⁴² Donne has created Sappho's voice, and again, in "Woman's Constancy," a female voice speaks the whole poem. Clearly, it is not only the female who needs to be constant. The speaker would rather inhabit a love-world beyond rhetorical cleverness and trite usage, and is prepared to take her listener with her to this special place, if only he can imagine the possibilities, and is prepared to accompany her.

In "Woman's Constancy" we again see Donne playing the most complicated and witty game: he speaks as a woman in order to deepen the possibilities that love provides for both men and women. The words are those any astute lover (regardless of gender) may long to hear.¹⁴³ It is the male lover now, who faces the abrupt and challenging opening:

Now thou hast loved me one whole day,

Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say? (1-2)

This opening presents the premise that all the following rhetorical questions attempt to answer. The poem begins with something *done*, and early tentative

¹⁴¹ Docherty, *Donne, Undone*, 61.

¹⁴² The importance of this value for all was reinforced in 1603 when Donne and Anne's first child was born: they christened her Constance. She married the actor, William Alleyn, in 1623 when she was twenty and he was fifty-seven, six years older than Donne. See Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 407-416.

¹⁴³ Robbins dates this poem widely, between 1592 and 1598. If Anne was the model, it would have to be the later date. What the poem does show is Donne's awareness of the female voice, its power and its intelligence. Robbins, *Poems*, 282.

steps towards love. The couplet ends with an awareness of voice, of something that needs to be *said* in response to this extraordinary event. In "Tomorrow" is an awareness that love may have a future beyond a simple physical consummation. She provides a more complex idea for her lover to consider. The lovers are separated in the pronouns "thou" and "me," and the first words the speaker gives to her (possibly thoughtless) lover to use are a "vow." By putting words in the male lover's mouth, she is taking them away from him, disabling their use. He will not now be able to pretend to unite himself with her in a spurious plural pronoun, nor use the nicety of argument that as they are different people today from what they were yesterday, yesterday's promises are null and void. "Vows" are denied him, and so are "oaths." In this denial, she is reminding him that this is a right she too will have to surrender, if their relationship is to move to a deeper level.¹⁴⁴

Or that oaths made in reverential fear

Of Love and his wrath any may forswear? (6-7)

He cannot personify "Love" as a wrathful force, and therefore justify breaking his word. He cannot hide behind an attempt to give such a reversal spiritual support, just because he describes his fear as "reverential." In the following lines, the woman even takes from him the possibility of using unsettled syntax to capture an image of a love that lasts only until one goes to bed to sleep:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ "Single women, whether widowed or unmarried, could, if they were of full age, inherit and administer land, make a will, sign a contract, possess property, sue and be sued ... But married women had no such rights under common law." Stephen Greenblatt (et. al), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 10.

¹⁴⁵ Donne's most clever use of unsettled syntax is in "The Sun Rising," where the convoluted syntax stresses the fact that the sun lacks the human capacity to "think," and is therefore inferior to the bed ensconced lovers:

Thy beams so reverend and strong

Or, as true deaths true marriages untie,
 So lover's contracts, images of those,
 Bind but till sleep, death's image, them unloose? (8-10)

The male lover cannot appeal to legal connotations to justify his acceptance of a simply transient love. Words like "forswear" and "contract," and in the line to come, "justify," are part of the trite male vocabulary of speeches used to end relationships. The following lines show she is particularly aware of a male inability to imagine beyond the accepted paradigm:

Or, your own end to justify,
 For having purposed change and falsehood, you
 Can have no way but falsehood to be true? (11-13)

She has heard all these excuses before, and ventriloquising the male is a powerful reversal. This is a meta-poetic master-class; she now fashions the poem to further her own meaning, and positions the man to join her in their prospective, imaginative leap towards a new love-world. In the final four lines the poem becomes her direct argument, rather than simply a list of the excuses he might have used. It is her words here that Bell provides as "proof" that the poem is spoken by a woman: she argues that, "The listener, the lunatic, must be a man

Why shouldst thou think?
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink ... (11-13)
 See Robbins, *Poems*, 248.

because he is under the influence of the moon, Luna, who is traditionally female."¹⁴⁶

The rhetorical questions cease, and the attempt to unsettle a female listener with forceful exclamations we have seen in other poems, now applies to the male:

Vain Lunatic! Against these scapes I could
 Dispute, and conquer, if I would,
 Which I abstain to do,
 For by tomorrow I may think so too. (14-17)

Her rhetorical control shows she is particularly capable: she is aware of pronouns, syntax and even of the power of enjambment, when she moves to make her capacity to "Dispute" (15) indisputable.

The importance of the poem does not lie in her cleverness, but in what she is offering her male lover. The poem starts with *doing* and *speaking*. It concludes with *thinking*. In "Woman's Constancy" there is no difference in the rhetorical awareness of the male and female, though the greater rhetorical ability, as it does in "Love's Pupil," may lie with the woman. She proffers the space between the last two lines of the poem as a very special space; it is a gap, aching to be filled. If entered, it will liberate both of them from the limitations of formulaic, seductive dialogue. Iser argues it is what is not said that gives weight and shape to meaning. The unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, and the "said" expands to take on greater significance. Empty spaces are "the pivot on which the whole text-

¹⁴⁶ Ilona Bell, "The Role of the Lady in Donne's *Songs and Sonets*, *Studies in English Literature* 23 (1985), 119.

reader relationship revolves."¹⁴⁷ The speaker looks to her lover to fill the empty space.

She returns him to a consideration that she had raised at the beginning of the poem, and contemplates "tomorrow." "Tomorrow," she might simply adopt the male perspective, and play the rhetorical love-game just as a man might. She would rather "abstain" from such an option. Between the final two lines of the poem, in the time that exists between "now" and "tomorrow," is a chance to explore another world entirely, without the rhetoric that is used to regulate an uncertain existence. This space contains the prospect of a relationship where voices will have to be different, and beyond the need to circumscribe love with gender expectations. Saunders argues that what the woman is offering her lover here is desire, not gender expectations.¹⁴⁸ And there is more to be said. The mutuality Donne explored in "The Flea" could be used to great advantage in the new love-world offered here. But time is running out for the lovers. Before "tomorrow" comes, they could decide to inhabit a space beyond the simply rhetorical. She can be as successful as any man, but she does not want this avenue of success if something better can be attained. She "may" have no choice but to accept a position of rhetorical cleverness "tomorrow," but she would rather not "think" like that now. The glimpse of a "mystic" love the tutor saw as a possibility with his student in "Love's Pupil," but could not deliver, is here proffered again, though now by a knowing woman. What the woman offers is a journey the two of them must make together, and it will be better for both of them. There are no words (as yet) that might describe what this mutual love might look like. There is no deep philosophical justification for

¹⁴⁷ Iser, *Reading*, 168-169.

¹⁴⁸ Saunders, *Desiring Donne*, 133-137.

rejecting the stereotypical love positions on offer; there is, rather, an aching awareness that more is needed.

The poem ends, then, not with an attempt to avoid an ongoing love, to laud sexual promiscuity or cheekily to suggest that women are as sexually adventurous as men, but with another glimpse of a new love-world that both lovers have to be able to imagine. The love the woman suggests they might share will be much more powerful than a simple avoidance of odious comparisons can achieve; it is a love that, despite her poetic and rhetorical ability, cannot be put into words. It is a love that exists in the space between the last two lines of the poem, and is waiting to be explored. Iser might well say that such an ability to imagine has the capacity to extend humankind's concept of what love might be: it is an example of literary anthropology. With the voice of an intelligent, assured and verbally adept woman, Donne has opened up a space which brave lovers may be prepared to enter. This is much more than a poem that simply considers a male's reaction in response to a woman's existence. To recognise the strength of the woman liberates both male and female. Here is a challenge to journey together towards the prospect of a finer, balanced love.

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Such a journey is reflected in two poems that were written during the early days of Donne's married life. Robbins convincingly dates "The Canonization" to the

spring of 1604.¹⁴⁹ He dates "The Ecstasy" more widely, though possibly as early as 1605.¹⁵⁰ Marotti sees a similarity in both poems, and notes of "The Ecstasy" that Donne "located the poem's thematic material in an autobiographical context"¹⁵¹ Both poems capture Donne's evolving understanding of what a reciprocal, mutual love, might be like.

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"The Canonization" is addressed, not to a poetic imperative, but to real voices of dissent. Our knowledge of manuscript publications is rarely specific. The dates and titles of works, the contexts from which they spring, are often a contentious matter. Wiggins, for example, vehemently denies any biographical import in "The Canonization," and stresses the need to focus on codes of behaviour.¹⁵² But despite Donne's later politic claim that imagination fuelled his poetry¹⁵³ (and it undoubtedly did), there were many real events that ignited that imagination. This poem was probably written in the week before 12th March, in the spring of 1604. The weather was unseasonably cold in March ("forward spring remove"), the plague had been much in evidence in 1603-4, and increased in spring 1604 ("Add one man to the plaguy bill"), four merchant ships were lost in the spring of 1604 ("What merchant ships have my sighs drowned?"), and the war in defence of Ostend was particularly fierce ("Soldiers find wars").¹⁵⁴ That Donne could respond to matters so recent showed that he may be living out of London,

¹⁴⁹ Robbins, *Poems*, 147.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵¹ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 198.

¹⁵² Wiggins, *Donne, Castiglione*, 95.

¹⁵³ See footnote 105.

¹⁵⁴ For more examples that would suggest this date of composition for the poem, see Robbins, *Poems*, 147-148. Also Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 137.

but he was still very much in touch. Such biographical awareness highlights the complexity and worth of Donne's achievement. His initial response may have been to the oft-quoted letter he received in 1604, that advises him that "the places of Attendance, such as may deserve you, grow dailie dearer," and exhorts him to leave Anne, for London.¹⁵⁵ The voices that respond show significant poetic control, and stress the cleverness Donne's absence denies the court. They also show his love for Anne. Again, Donne is making the one set of words do so much.

Donne's opening voice is aggressive, peremptory. He takes on himself, all blame, and enters the world his critics offer. He plays with their sense of "approval." Here, "approve" means a thoughtless assessment; Donne will hold this word in abeyance, and his love will change it's meaning in the final stanza. Iser argues that literature is a game played by both reader and author. In a game, a move by one player is meant to be blocked by his opponent. But if only blocking occurs, the game becomes increasingly narrow. If the counter move is rather a development, new possibilities arise, and the game opens up.¹⁵⁶ Donne's move to canonize the lovers may be a sleight of hand, but the game has been opened up. The final redefining of "approve" forces his opponents (and the coterie) to play at a higher level.

The first stanza ends with powerful simplicity:

So you will let me love.

(9)

¹⁵⁵ R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press (1970), 144. Also Robbins, *Poems*, 149. The letter was probably from Tobie Matthew. The stance Donne takes in "The Canonization," of lovers against the world, was not one he had always adopted. In the poem "That short roll of friends" that Robbins, *Poems*, (35-36) dates as early 1590s, Donne reprimands his friend for neglecting the "duties of societies," and being too enamored of his wife. Donne did not meet Anne until 1598. See Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 104.

¹⁵⁶ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 267.

In the second stanza, Donne enters another world, that of the Petrarchan poet. The false alarm of "Alas, alas!" and the simple questions that follow, all suggest a pursuit that one seeking a fulfilling relationship should reject. Donne concludes the stanza with strong, reasoned statements:

Soldiers find wars and lawyers find out still
 Litigious men which quarrels move,
 Though she and I do love. (16-18)

His poetic world is stronger than such false emotion could contain; there are truths about the possibilities of human, loving behaviour, which he must explore. Life for others will go on as it always has; he and Anne are on a different path.¹⁵⁷ He captures this in the progression of personal pronouns. It is "his" love in the first and second stanza, but "she" is included in line 18, and they are irrevocably united in the plural pronoun from here on. Donne is living inside a poetic world that will allow him to explore the possibilities that neither the outside political world, nor false poetic worlds, are able to countenance.

In the space following the second stanza, Donne's critical interlocutor (Iser's game opponent) speaks again; then, Donne seeks refuge inside the poetry.

Call us what you will, we're made by such love;
 Call her one, me another fly,

¹⁵⁷ Line 15 of the poem reads, in Robbins:
 Add one man to the plaguy bill?

In other editions, for example Herbert J. C. Grierson, the word "more" appears after "one." Whether "man" or "more," "more" is clearly understood. It encourages the reader to specifically think of Anne. Robbins, *Poems*, n. 15, 150. Grierson, *Poetical Works*, 14.

We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
 And we in us find th' eagle and the dove;
 The phoenix riddle hath more wit
 By us: we two, being one, are it. (19-24)

The poetry allows the lovers to be both fly and taper, eagle and dove, and to enjoy the attendant sexual suggestions; it is the poetry that transforms "it" into a whole world. The woman is now an integral part of a mutual love-world that demands to be continually explored and extended. In the final lines of the stanza, Donne finds a place the lovers in "Sappho" could only imagine, a place that is truly beyond the limitations of gender:

So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
 We die and rise the same, and prove
 Mysterious by this love. (25-27)

It is a wonderful poetic power that can "prove" a "mystery," and create the mutuality "Woman's Constancy" could only foreshadow. This "mystery" is much more impressive than the mere list that Donne's critics were encouraging him to pursue in the opening stanza.¹⁵⁸ Donne's voice evokes an all-conquering religion of love:

We can die by it, if not live by love,

¹⁵⁸ For more on the divine sense that "mystery" evokes, see Guibbory, "Erotic Poetry," 143.

And if unfit for tomb or hearse
 Our legend be, it will be fit for verse
 And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
 We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms—
 As well a well-wrought urn becomes
 The greatest ashes as half-acre tombs—
 And by those hymns, all shall approve
 Us canonized for love. (28-36)

Sonnets and urns are transformed into much more public "hymns;" Donne still desires to publically exhibit his love so others may learn and benefit. Marotti sees the final stanza achieving an emotional equilibrium, which helps Donne to continue his life as father to an increasing brood of children, as lover to his wife, and as aspirant to courtly offices.¹⁵⁹ The lovers have moved beyond death, and will live forever in the poetry, inside the shape the poetry provides. In Donne's later sermons, these "pretty rooms" will become palaces, and the rooms through which he will have his congregation pass will structure his message.¹⁶⁰ The voice that speaks here is a voice that belongs to both Donne and Anne, a unified voice of love that creates its own world. Kenneth Gross notes development of voice in their critics, that "by the end of the poem these external voices, though not exiled or silenced, are radically and optimistically transformed." He argues that in "The Canonization," Donne is doing more than simply assessing the cost of his love, and is rather "in dialogue with himself, with his own more extreme knowledge or

¹⁵⁹ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 164-165.

¹⁶⁰ For Donne's later reworking of the ideas of "The Sun Rising," see John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-62), v, 266, and vi, 170.

poetic and intellectual ambitions."¹⁶¹ This is not the world of court sycophancy, nor that of poetry by Petrarchan numbers. The woman is no longer the touchstone against which the male must measure himself. Now the standard by which they will measure their love is the prospect that their love will outlast death. As Cleanth Brooks notes, this poem "is an instance of the doctrine it asserts."¹⁶² It is poetry that transforms the limited view that "approve" projected in stanza one, into a new, appropriately witty meaning in the third stanza that not only rhymes with "love," but also directs their love critics to worship their chosen lifestyle.

This is a dramatic poem; the images used are verbal, rather than optical — the final punning on "contract," for example, encompasses both a sense of "concentrate," and a legally binding contract. But in a logical sense, the move in the final stanza to the past tense, that suggests the canonization has already occurred, is a ruse. Despite the cleverness, the lovers still need to exist in the real world. The best they can really ask for is not the grand gesture of being evoked as saints of love, but more prosaically, to be accepted and understood. For all its wit, the fear that a poetic claim of unending love may not be all that is needed to sustain life, still exists. Donne has not finished with contemplations that might form a philosophy of love. He will come to this in "The Ecstasy." Here again, he needs an observer to validate his loving existence, and to help clarify his ideas. This interaction of voices is a significant development in Donne's poetry, a move beyond the earlier, more simple reporting of voices in the elegies.

¹⁶¹ Kenneth Gross, "John Donne's Lyric Skepticism: In Strange Way," *Modern Philology*, 101:3 (February, 2004): 380, 383.

¹⁶² Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968), 12.

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Iser's view of literature as a game, of the text as a place in which to play, is particularly helpful in a discussion of "The Ecstasy." Even more so, if Marotti's claim that "The Ecstasy" was written in response to Edward Herbert's "Ode upon a Question Moved," is correct.¹⁶³ For Iser, literature is no retreat from life into an ivory tower, but rather he notes that literature begets literature, that "successful visualizations of the invisible are taken over in order that their symbolizations may be used to chart new areas of the ungraspable."¹⁶⁴ It is with "The Ecstasy"¹⁶⁵ that Donne contemplates a philosophy that underpins the love-world that "Woman's Constancy" has offered, and "The Canonization" has seen come to early fruition. In this poem the mutuality posited so far in the *Songs and Sonnets*, is made stronger by a forced separation.¹⁶⁶

There is no loving dialogue, no voice other than that of the frustrated body. This unmoving, if languid depiction of love, is in the past tense. A more developed scene than a thwarted union needs to be presented:

If any, so by love refined
 That he souls' language understood,
 And by good love were grown all mind,

¹⁶³ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 196-7.

¹⁶⁴ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 257.

¹⁶⁵ Robbins dates this poem widely, 1605-1613. It would certainly appear to be a later poem than "The Sun Rising" and "The Canonization," as it more seriously extends concepts both these poems have raised. See Robbins, *Poems*, 169.

¹⁶⁶ It is often important for Donne to pull things apart, and then rejoin them to achieve something much greater. The Valedictory poems do this. In "Batter my heart," Donne hopes his separation from God will be triumphantly and violently ended, in order to achieve final salvation.

Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knew not which soul spake:
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take;
 And part far purer than he came. (21-28)

The audience of previous poems, that prompts the speaker to explore and develop his ideas, is here a "refined" observer. He has surely passed many of the love tests Donne has previously set. He understands a love that exists beyond odious comparisons, attempted ownership, and the unpleasant "rent stony ground" abhorred by Sappho. He understands the non-verbal language of love. Unlike some tutors in love, he is prepared to continue to learn, and is capable of doing so. As Iser argues, empty spaces can be joined over a period of time, to provide a view for the reader: they are "important guiding devices for building up the aesthetic object."¹⁶⁷ The reader's wandering viewpoint is organised into a referential field.¹⁶⁸ Yet any view the reader adopts, of course, will not remain fixed, but be subject to continual change.¹⁶⁹

In presenting his love to the observer, Donne is also explaining it to himself. Because of his journey towards a finer understanding of what love might be, the observer will be "far purer," and more capable of contemplating ecstatic love. Yet an ecstatic love seems still beyond the power of words to capture. It is beyond sexual lust, and encompasses a mutuality that negates gendered limitations:

¹⁶⁷ Iser, *Reading*, 198.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

'But, as several souls contain
 Mixture of things, they know not what,
 Love these mixed souls doth mix again,
 And makes both one, each this and that.' (33-36)

Ecstatic love is a mystery. Donne returns observer and reader to the reality of the violet that reclined its head in the opening stanza:

'A single violet transplant,
 The strength, the colour, and the size
 (All which before was poor and scant)
 Redoubles still, and multiplies.' (37-40)

Here is proof that an entity, separated, can be later reunited with beneficial effect.¹⁷⁰ If this process is to be applied to souls, a special word, like "Interinanimates," is needed to describe the mystical result.¹⁷¹ The compound word points to the poem's conclusion. For the moment, there is still a "working through"

¹⁷⁰ Early moderns were fascinated by the possibilities and implications of parthenogenesis. See Elizabeth A. Spiller, "Poetic Parthenogenesis and Spencer's Idea of Creation in *The Fairie Queen*," *Studies in English Literature*, 40:1 (Winter, 2000): 63-79.

¹⁷¹ Donne used the shorter "inanimates" in a positive way in *Pseudo-Martyr*: "God inanimates ... every man with one soul." See John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr*, Anthony Raspa, ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 172. *Pseudo-Martyr* was a tract Donne wrote in support of the Church of England. It was published in 1610, and any sense of the negative here would not have been appropriate. Even if Donne's meaning of "inanimates" in "The Ecstasy" is positive (though it does not fit with the progress the soul undertakes), the final impression of a shared love beyond the power of words to capture (and thus Donne's attempt here), is clear. For more on this word, see Matthias Bauer and Angelika Zirker, "Sites of Death as Sites of Interaction in Donne and Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, Judith H. Anderson et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 23-4. Also note Robbins, *Poems*, 177n, and Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 55.

of ideas to pursue. The "abler soul" can apparently control loneliness, but Sappho has shown this is not possible without bodily presence.

Their two bodies are finally called upon to reappear, not now as inactive statues, but as a moving necessity. Donne is trying to convey the dialect of souls, and this can only be done through the body and the sublime mutuality it provides:

'We owe them thanks, because they thus
 Did us to us at first convey,
 Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
 Nor are dross to us, but allay.' (53-56)

Anita Gilman Sherman argues that Donne invents a private language in "The Ecstasy," and that it is the body that exhibits this language. This is a move that she notes as being "from private language to physical gesture."¹⁷² But in order to capture the ecstasy that love can provide, the poem insists that we need both a vocal language and a body. The repetition of "us" combines the lovers in a refined love space. The voice the "refined" observer now hears is clear: the body is a rightfully integral part of achieving ecstatic perfection:

'T'our bodies turn we, then, that so
 Weak men on love revealed may look:
 Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
 But yet the body is his book.' (69-72)

¹⁷² Anita Gilman Sherman, "Fantasies of Private Language in 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' and 'The Ecstasy,'" in *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, Judith H. Anderson et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 170, 180.

Donne clearly enjoys others watching him make love. This is teaching by example. It is not just traditional gendered intercourse being observed; it is lovemaking by androgynous equals that is the lesson. Catherine Gimelli Martin notes it is "masculine and feminine elements [which] gradually merge into a higher 'dialogue of one.'"¹⁷³ Blaine Greteman argues that for Donne, the body is the jewel in the cabinet.¹⁷⁴ The lovers here go beyond the angelic state that the bodies have assumed at the beginning of the poem (immobile on an idyllic bank, hands only touching), to achieve a physical "interanimation" that even the angels cannot embrace. Again, it is the process of poetry that allows Donne to "work through" a philosophy of love.¹⁷⁵ It is poetry that has the ability to separate and rejoin body and soul, and have all viewed and processed by a knowing observer. Voices have been muted: the bodies at the beginning said nothing; the souls spoke, but words were inadequate. Words constructed for the occasion can only mirror soulful mutuality. If one looks for bodily changes, they will have to look discerningly, and even then, change will be hard to detect. This "dialogue of one" is to be listened to, but the final message lies more in the image of the transplanted violets that symbolise constancy, than in the words. To overcome the limitations of gender expectation, and to allow the essential role of the body, are cornerstones of ecstatic love. No more can be said of love, other than it is a "mystery." This is the greatest accolade love can be afforded.

¹⁷³ Catherine Gimelli Martin, "The Erotology of Donne's 'Extasie' and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44:1 The English Renaissance (Winter, 2004): 134.

¹⁷⁴ Blaine Greteman, "'All this seed pearl': John Donne and Bodily Presence," *College Literature* 37:3 (Summer, 2010): 39.

¹⁷⁵ Sir Thomas More had also created an exploratory space in 1515 when he was invited to enter the King's service, and faced with the choice of remaining a visionary or becoming a courtier, examined the problem through a fiction in *Utopia*. See Altman, *Tudor*, 80-87.

The transformative journey Donne and his lover experience has not ended. Ecstatic love is not an end in itself, but an ongoing, growing wonder. This is not a seduction poem in the sense that "To His Mistress Going to Bed" or "The Flea" are seduction poems. The purpose of "The Ecstasy" goes beyond any physical conquest, although it certainly envisages physical congress as a necessary component of ecstatic love. Voices here are directed to the observers and the reader; and Donne has refined his own ideas in the poetry. What is left at the end of this poem is the idea of love. In "Sappho," Donne had divested himself of masculinity and poetic ability, and all that was left at the end was an achingly absent love. With "The Ecstasy" the love is also beyond words, but is now mysteriously and poetically present, and it is the mystery of an evolving love that observers and readers are asked to contemplate. The fear that an unending love may not be possible, remains to be faced.

Chapter Five

Separations sought, and accommodated.

Voices in "The Ecstasy" work to reinforce the role the body must play if love is to be experienced on the highest plane. This is the lesson Donne personally explores, and that the observer, who can look beyond physical appearance, is meant to learn. But some observers and readers may misread the signs.

Magdalen Herbert was one of Donne's patronesses, and the mother of one of his closest friends. Donne had written her letters that were playful, flirty, and exhibited some degree of sexual frisson.¹⁷⁶ He had a suite of sonnets, "La Corona," and an accompanying poem, ready to send to her.¹⁷⁷ He had been away in London, and had just returned; despite the organised packet, he was clearly unprepared for her servant's knock on his door. He needed to add the following letter to the poems

¹⁷⁶ Cabinets were kept in houses to contain precious artifacts, often letters. In a letter to Magdalen Herbert, Donne puns on the possibilities this might evoke. See "To Mrs. Magdalen Herbert," ("Mad paper, stay ..."), (33-35) in Robbins, *Poems*, 677-680.

¹⁷⁷ See Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 252-253. Also note Robbins, *Poems*, 475.

he gave to that servant. It is quoted in Walton, and is one of four letters we have that Donne wrote to Herbert. It bears close reading:

Madam,

Your favours to me are everywhere; I use them, and have them. I enjoy them at London, and leave them there; and yet, find them at Micham: Such Riddles as these become things unexpressible; and, such is your goodness. I was almost sorry to find your Servant here this day, because I was loth to have any witness of my not coming home last Night, and indeed of my coming this Morning: But, my not coming was excusable, because earnest business detain'd me; and my coming this day, is by the example of your St. Mary Magdalen, who rose early upon Sunday, to seek that which she lov'd most, and so did I. And, from her and my self, I return such thanks as are due to one to whom we owe all the good opinion, that they whom we need most, have of us — by this Messenger, and on this good day, I commit the enclosed *Holy Hymnes* and *Sonnets* (which for the matter, not the workmanship, have yet escap'd the fire) to your judgement, and to your protection too, if you think them worthy of it; and I have appointed this inclosed Sonnet to usher them to your happy hand.¹⁷⁸

She was certainly not averse to younger men, nor were they to her. When she married Lord Danvers in February 1609, her new husband was not only

¹⁷⁸ John Donne, *John Donne, Selected Prose. Chosen by Evelyn Simpson*, eds. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 124-125. This letter is also quoted in Robbins, *Poems*, 488.

reputedly handsome, but was also more than twenty years younger than she was, and certainly younger than Donne.¹⁷⁹

The letter begins with a sense of frustration in the repetition of "them." The "favours" Herbert bestows, or intends to bestow, on Donne, cannot be specifically mentioned. Bettie Anne Doebler and Retha M. Warnicke argue that the "favours" mentioned in this letter might relate to the influence Herbert had in the Virginia Company, and her desire to help a struggling Donne achieve a position.¹⁸⁰ But the vague pronouns avoid a crass listing, and hide as much as they advertise the pair's attachment. In the progression from "them" to "these," her favours come, uncomfortably for Donne, closer to home. The appropriate syntactical climax is an awareness of her "goodness."¹⁸¹ Donne creates tension between the superficial appearance of the text, and its underlying meaning. He purports not to understand what might underscore her persistence ("Riddles"), and adopts a naïve stance: her pursuit of him surely has nothing to do with desire. Donne's control of voice had not won the day when, years earlier, he had punned on his own name in his letter to Anne's father. Here, he has to be just as careful. He and Anne need Mrs Herbert's support; he cannot afford to offend her. Yet he clearly does not want to take their flirtatious relationship any further. He has to position Herbert such that she accepts a rejection of a physical union, and still feels sexually valued. She was a

¹⁷⁹ See H. W. Garrod, "Donne and Mrs. Herbert," *The Review of English Studies*, 21:83 (July, 1945): 161-173. Also see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>. under the heading Danvers, Sir John (1584/5 - 1655): "In 1609, when only in his early twenties, he married a widow, Magdalen Herbert ... a woman fully twice his age and the mother of ten children" (Accessed December 8, 2014).

¹⁸⁰ Bettie Anne Doebler and Retha M. Warnicke, "Magdalen Herbert Danvers and Donne's Vision of Comfort," *George Herbert Journal* 10(1986): 9.

¹⁸¹ Emma L. Roth-Schwartz has noted the consistent punctuation patterns in Donne's prose letters. While her work is useful in exploring meaning in this letter, it may reflect Donne's understanding of his own punctuation usage, rather than any grammatical agreement his readers may have shared with him. Emma L. Roth-Schwartz, "Colon and Semi-Colon in Donne's Prose Letters: Practice and Principle," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 3:1 (1997): 1-37. See particularly section V, no. 27.

talented woman, accomplished enough to write a letter that decided a legal dispute, and which some early scholars thought had been written by Sir George More, and strong enough to ensure her almost seventeen year old son would marry "up," when unusually, he wed his twenty one year old cousin.¹⁸² Garrod claims her influence was the catalyst for Donne beginning to write his "Divine Poems" in 1607.¹⁸³ Donne uses his poetic voice to try to distance himself from her; his late return to his matrimonial home is explained by being involved with "earnest business," a traditional early modern poetic excuse for an inability to be constant in love.¹⁸⁴ The most important point the letter makes here is that his not being available for her is excusable. He explains he is following the example of her saint, who on a Sunday morning, "sought that which she loved most." Herbert is guided to accept her close association with her name-sake; Donne balances her pursuit, with his desire to be with Anne. He does this as he has done in his poetry, with a progression of personal pronouns, where "her" and "I" are combined in an unshakeable "we" and "us." Donne is making it clear that it is Anne whom he loves most, when he includes his wife in thanking his patroness for her solicitations. He concludes the letter with the usual abject apologies for writerly shortcomings that attend works sent to patrons. A more considered, poetic response, would be required.

Not all critics hear the frustrated tone of voice, nor see the delicate need Donne has to strike a balance in this letter. Garrod quotes the letter in full, but his

¹⁸² This letter discussed the purchase of her son Edward's marriage for eight hundred pounds. See Doebler and Warnicke, "Magdalen Herbert," 7 and n. 7, 19.

¹⁸³ Garrod, "Donne and Mrs. Herbert," 173.

¹⁸⁴ Donne refers to "business" in "La Corona", in the fourth sonnet, (11-12), and presents the same sense of honest endeavour and application. See Robbins, *Poems*, 482. Donne references the same idea, but this time referring to the love of God, in "Good Friday: Made as I was Riding Westward that Day":

Pleasure or business so our souls admit
For their first mover, and are whirled by it. (7-8) (Robbins, *Poems*, 564.)

main concern is to date it. He argues persuasively for a date of January 11, 1607. But despite the close relationship between Donne and Herbert, Garrod does not see any necessary biographical reference to her in "The Relic," a poem that clearly plays on her name, "Magdalen." Maureen Sabine thinks the poem reflects Donne's desire to be with Anne in heaven.¹⁸⁵ Dayton Haskin sees "The Relic" as "a great poem about the power of a potentially adulterous attraction," but he rejects the intrusion of any biographical reference as he feels it would take the focus of attention away from the poetry.¹⁸⁶ Grierson, however, thinks the opposite.¹⁸⁷ And so does Stubbs, who notes that Donne had "managed to annoy two women."¹⁸⁸ Catherine Gimelli Martin posits that "Donne's lyrics ... are in many ways antimonological, implying multiple and even competing voices within their narrative structure."¹⁸⁹ This is an idea that deserves to be kept in mind when reading "The Relic."¹⁹⁰ The letter adds to our understanding of the life Donne was living at Mitcham, and suggests a broader view needs to be taken of "The Relic," one that notes the internal progression and movement in the poem. Both the letter and the poem are personal and private: we only have four letters that Donne sent to Herbert, and "The Relic" does not appear in any of the nineteen commonplace books that included Donne's poetry and were examined by Robert A. Bryant.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Maureen Sabine, "No Marriage in Heaven; John Donne, Anne Donne, and the Kingdom Come," in Hester, "Desire of More," 228-255.

¹⁸⁶ It is not a concern for knowledge, but rather for a personal aesthetic, that motivates this belief: "The poem is richer for the woman's identity remaining hidden." Haskin, "Love Lyric," 200.

¹⁸⁷ See Grierson, *Poetical Works*, xxi-xxii, and Garrod, "Mrs Herbert," 167.

¹⁸⁸ Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 217-218. For general comments on jealous patronesses, see Martin Seymour-Smith, *Poets through their letters*, (London: Constable, 1969), 114-115.

¹⁸⁹ Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Nothing like the Sun: Transcending Time and Change in Donne's Love Lyrics and Shakespeare's Plays," in Anderson and Vaught, *Shakespeare and Donne*, 59.

¹⁹⁰ I have previously noted how difficult it is to biographically situate Donne's poetry. But many critics try to do so. Marotti, for example, believes Donne composed "The Funeral" for Lady Bedford, the patroness Donne finally settled upon to be his sole object of dedication. See Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 211. As with "The Sun Rising" and "The Canonization," some biographical detail is hard to dispute. Indeed, it cannot be ignored if poetic meaning is to be fully explored.

¹⁹¹ Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 17, and n. 62, 297.

This letter to Herbert is importantly different from those Donne later sent to the Countess of Bedford.¹⁹² There is a sense of finality in Donne's letter to Herbert; there is an evolving relationship captured in his letters to Bedford. With the Bedford letters there is a concern for the slowness or the lack of response. With Herbert, the concern is that her response is too frequent. And Donne's desire to be at Bedford's side as suggestive supplicant (his letters in her cabinet, a stone fountain in her garden), rather than as actual lover, contrasts with the implied domestic disruption Herbert's messenger occasions. Cedric C. Brown argues that because Donne's letters to Bedford introduce and position the Lucy poems, those letters make Donne's poetic meaning in those poems more clear.¹⁹³ Donne, it seems, has the same intent in preceding "The Relic" with his letter to Herbert. As with most of Donne's poems, "The Relic" is imagination, based on fact. But this poem is special. It has to be.

Herbert has to be repositioned to accept an intellectual construct that transcends the promise of immediate physical enjoyment. Gross has noted that this poem feels like "a response to some present situation of loss or violated privacy...."¹⁹⁴ Awareness of the biographical context extends this observation. The movement in the opening stanza is from interrupted death to the prospect of physical dalliance:

When my grave is broke up again

Some second guest to entertain —

¹⁹² Lady Bedford was invited to Donne's home in August 1608, when she became godmother to his daughter, Lucy. See Cedric C. Brown, "Presence, obligation and memory in John Donne's texts for the Countess of Bedford," *Renaissance Studies*, 22:1 (February, 2008), 78.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁹⁴ Gross, "Donne's Lyric Skepticism," 391.

(For graves have heard that womanhead:

To be to more than one a bed) (1-4)

The opening voice is arresting; the speaker is already dead. Between the brackets, Donne unsettles the reader with a witty aside that suggests female inconstancy.

Others will observe the scene, and see what they are capable of seeing:

And he that digs it spies

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone (5-6)

Donne mixes autobiography with imagination,¹⁹⁵ and poetic control; the heavy "b" sounds of line six help the image stay with the reader. Then, in the elided plural personal pronoun, he has her in the grave with him:

Will he not let's alone,

And think that there a loving couple lies,

Which thought that this device might in some way

To make their souls at the last, busy day

Meet at this grave, and make a little stay? (7-11)

Just as Donne is aware of the hair bracelet being a "device," so the poem itself is a device. The bracelet is a sign of a great love made pure, of the carnal and the spiritual combined. The prospect of angelic purity in heaven, is a non-sexual

¹⁹⁵ The plague was a deadly backdrop for London in the early modern age. It was particularly fierce in 1582, and again in 1608 and 1609. Donne preaches about the end of the plague in 1626. See Robbins, *Poems*, n. 3-4, 240.

prospect. There, in the grave, is the chance of a final, physical reunion. Here, in the poem, is the humour: the half rhyme of "lies" and "device" that might appeal to a knowing poet whose habit for the self-referential cannot always be contained. Donne moves from the verbal to the visual; his voice creates the opportunity for Herbert to see an evocative love scene, and then he will lead her to an even more special place, beyond an initial sexual need. The argument has not finished.

The gravedigger is an observer who ironically places the bracelet in its rightful, and false, position:

If this fall in a time or land
 When mis-devotion doth command,
 Then he that digs us up will bring
 Us to the bishop and the king,
 To make us relics: (12-16)

In a Protestant kingdom, religious relics were viewed as a Papal conspiracy to trap the unwary; such a symbol is a sign of misdirected love. Again, Donne takes refuge in humour:

then
 Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I
 A something else thereby (16-18)

Mary Magdalen, the prostitute saved by Jesus because all she did was love too much, is an ideal exempla for Donne to employ. Just as Jesus changed Mary

Magdalen's profession, so is Donne hoping to curtail Herbert's ardour. The humorous ambiguity that allows Donne to be both Jesus, and a customer, is captured in Donne's vague self-depiction.

The poetic wit develops when Donne leaves behind graves, misdevotion and prostitutes, and enters a much more realistic love-world. This is the world of real miracles, the world with which Hebert is now presented:

All women shall adore us (and some men);
 And since at such times miracles are sought,
 I would that age were by this paper taught
 What miracles we harmless lovers wrought (19-22)

The aside within the brackets captures his claimed understanding of differing emotional depths. Donne's voice is knowing: he is teaching Herbert that new roles can be accommodated between lovers. In the second stanza they are united in the plural pronoun, a succession of "us" that culminates in "we."

The movement of the poem is still to be completed.¹⁹⁶ With the past tense of "wrought," and the conditional mood, we are taken into the future, with Donne looking back on a life lived. Between the second and third stanzas, this very special relationship is placed in perspective:

First, we loved well and faithfully,

¹⁹⁶ "The Relic" is 33 lines long. Jesus was 33 when he died. Donne had written a poem entitled "Resurrection (Imperfect)". It was 22 lines long. Whether 33 lines makes "The Relic" perfect is a moot point. There are more than forty different stanza forms among *The Songs and Sonnets*, enough to satisfy most critical dispositions. What can be said is that Donne was aware of the number of lines in a poem, and the attendant symbolism.

Yet knew not what we loved, nor why:
 Difference of sex no more we knew,
 Than our guardian angels do. (23-26)

The allusion to their love as a mystery that transcends sexual differences again presents the arguments of "The Ecstasy," and these poems may well have been written about the same time. There are reminders too of "seals" mentioned in earlier poems, but here the speaker's voice is much more respectful:¹⁹⁷

Coming and going, we
 Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
 Our hands ne'er touched those seals
 Which Nature, injured by late law, sets free. (27-30)

Their kisses were polite and socially appropriate, yet also ambrosial, sustaining; food fit for angels.¹⁹⁸ They were above any loose morality their society might have found acceptable. What Donne is giving Herbert here is his argument and wit, rather than his body. The wit culminates in the following lines:

These miracles we did; but now, alas,
 All measure and all language I should pass,
 Should I tell what a miracle she was. (32-33)

¹⁹⁷ In "To His Mistress Going to Bed," the line is: "where my hand is set, my seal shall be." (32) In "Love's Pupil," the image of sealing wax on a letter is more gross: "Chafe wax for others' seals?" (29)

¹⁹⁸ Spenser had used this image in "Hymn in Honour of Love." See Robbins, *Poems*, n. 28. p. 242.

This tawdry poetic trope, where the writer claims his love is so wonderful that it is beyond any power to capture, prepares the way for the outrageous positioning that the poem provides after the final full stop. Herbert is left to contemplate being Mary Magdalen, and with the final words, the *adynaton*, being so well worn an expression, Herbert is grounded in the ordinary, so she can more readily accept the extraordinary. This now must be a love of the past, so the plural pronouns cease, and the individual pronouns "I" and "she" are separated by "what a miracle" in the final line. Iser argues that texts are patterns that guide the reader's imagination, and that any meanings sought in the text are best seen in an image.¹⁹⁹ Here, the imagination is most important. Donne moves beyond the powerful image of the "hair about the bone." He believes Herbert can be more influenced by an intellectual mystery, an imaginative leap, anchored in the shared name; he is suggesting a prospect more outrageous than the solely visual.²⁰⁰ Donne leaves Herbert room to understand and explore what knowledge, beyond the blind faith in a hair bracelet, might entail. It entails the miracle of "telling," the miracle of Donne's voice.

In many of his poems, Donne encourages diverse interpretations. Meanings are often multilayered, and provide for a variety of reader responses. But this poem was for private consumption. The letter that Donne writes to accompany his gift of *Holy Hymns* and *Sonnets*, might be viewed in a number of ways by Herbert. But "The Relic" is different. There can be no room for misinterpretation here. In "The Funeral," Donne may be able to vent his anger at one who refuses to accept

¹⁹⁹ Iser, *Reading*, 9.

²⁰⁰ For a study that grounds such ideas in an exploration of brain function, see G. Gabrielle Starr, "Multisensory Imagery," in *Introduction to Cognitive Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 275-291. Also note Lisa Zunshine, "Lying Bodies of the Enlightenment: Theory of Mind and Cultural Historicism," in Zunshine, *Cognitive Cultural Studies*, 115-133.

and play a proffered role. The hair bracelet here may be the only thing that keeps him from "dissolution."²⁰¹ With "The Relic," the hair bracelet is a symbol that is surpassed by the poetry. Donne may claim that his poetry is insufficient to capture the miraculous state to which she is elevated. In truth, what he poetically creates for her is a mystery of deep religious importance. She is raised far above any risqué contemplations, a position that places her beyond any future family complications that her continuing pursuit of Donne might have occasioned.²⁰² The most important voice of "The Relic" is that which positions and placates Herbert, and allows the poet to continue to explore his life with one less challenge to face.²⁰³

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The clues as to dating "A Valediction: Of the Book" are not as clear as they are with "The Relic." If the separation the poem addresses relates to a specific event, it is most likely to be Donne's departure for the Continent with Sir Walter Chute in early 1605.²⁰⁴ Margaret Downs-Gamble posits the poem was written for Lucy Russell, the Countess of Bedford. If so, this would give the poem a later date.²⁰⁵ If there is a biographical import to the poem (regardless of its date of composition), it is the speaker's journey, his changing view of separation, and his

²⁰¹ "The Funeral," Robbins, *Poems*, 191-193. This quotation, line 8.

²⁰² Doebler and Warnicke, "Magdalen Herbert," 11. In cognitive scientific terms, if the success of art is judged by its ability to change people, then "The Relic" is a successful poem. Magdalen Hebert ceased her pursuit of Donne, married her young man soon after, and remained on good terms with her earlier encomiastic supporter.

²⁰³ In Donne's sermon for Magdalen Herbert, he offers her an afterlife that will last "for ever, and ever, and ever, and infinite, and super infinite ever." John Donne, *Sermons*, viii, 92. Herbert's son, George, was so pleased with Donne's commemorative service for his mother that he wrote nineteen poems, attached them to Donne's sermon, and printed them in 1627. Doebler and Warnicke, "Magdalen Herbert," 5.

²⁰⁴ Robbins, *Poems*, 268.

²⁰⁵ Margaret Downs-Gamble, "Marking the 'dark eclipses': Taking Longitude from 'Valediction of the Booke' and 'Valediction to his booke,'" *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne* 28 (2009), 291.

reassessment of the qualities that a woman might possess, that seems most important. The speaker's opening voice is urgent and conspiratorial. He instructs her; it is a rhetorical attempt to avoid being blamed for leaving:

I'll tell thee now, dear love, what thou shalt do
 To anger Destiny, as she doth us;
 How I shall stay, though she eloin²⁰⁶ me thus,
 And how posterity shall know it too... (1-4)

This dramatic conversation springs from the fear of separation, and suspicion that their world will disintegrate.²⁰⁷ But they can be together in the word, and can still remain a love lesson to "posterity." The references that follow, supposedly provided to have her obey his instructions, are in truth all negative. Sibyl was reputed to have destroyed books in order to gain the price she had originally requested, and neither "Her from whom Pindar could allure" (Corinna) (7) nor "her through whose help Lucan is not lame" (Staius) (8) have been named. They exist only as unremarked extensions of men who have subsumed their abilities, to claim them for their own.²⁰⁸ Harvey notes the periphrastic description of these women, but does not see the development in Donne's voice throughout the poem. She argues that any male attempt to present a female voice is problematic: "... if

²⁰⁶ There are various spellings of this word in various manuscripts. It is a French legal term, that Sir John Davies had used in a satirical sense to parody jargon laden sonnet sequences. Donne's use of it here is a sign that the speaker's voice will change by the end of the poem. See Robbins, *Poems*, n. 3, 269.

²⁰⁷ Donne's fear of separation and death is frequently faced in his poetry. Love poems can commence with a death. For a psychological explanation, see Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 156-252.

²⁰⁸ "Legend says the Cumaeen Sybil offered nine books of the oracles to the Roman King, Tarquinius Superbus. But he regarded the price as too high, and refused, whereupon the Sybil burned three of them. She offered him the remaining six; again he refused, and she burnt three more. He bought the surviving three — and at the original price." Michael Stapleton, *The Hamlyn Concise Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1992), 262.

women are excluded from legal and civic contexts and by extension exiled from the text, who is to ensure that their representatives can or will genuinely argue for their interests?"²⁰⁹ Yet the male voice Donne captures here is unconvincing. The speaker's references to classical women writers seem facile and glib. The dismissive tone of his bracketed aside suggests his true feelings, his belief that the suggestion of their being any women writers of worth, is unreliable hearsay:

And her whose book (they say) Homer did find, and name ... (9)

In truth, the power of these women writers was such that they produced works to be desired. The speaker, in trying to cement his argument in classical analogues, is beginning a journey that will result in him reassessing his own world, and his place in it. He requires her to:

Study our manuscripts, those myriads
Of letters which have passed twixt thee and me.
Thence write our annals, and in them will be,
To all whom love's subliming fire invades,
Rules and examples found. (10-14)

The speaker may be trying to rhetorically manipulate her here, but he has put the pen in her hand, and now any semblance of control he may have had over her is lost. In the letters that they have so far shared, they have only been individuals, only "thee" and "mee." In the pun on "annals," of Donne's "Anne" being his "all,"

²⁰⁹ Harvey, *Voices*, 127.

lies the truth of the power of poetry, and its ability to provide a world which the lovers can inhabit. She has written letters in the past, and the speaker admits she is capable of creating an exemplum of love that knowing observers — "all whom love's subliming fires invades" — might emulate. His voice here has changed, almost in spite of himself. Her ability worries him; she may not write as he might wish.

He tries to solidify their position, and to consecrate their love in the verbs of the wedding service:

To make, to keep, to use, to be these his records. (18)

Their manuscripts and letters, he claims, create their Bible of Love. His control continues to weaken. The poetry is taking him in a new direction, creating a new language of love. His use of "We" that starts line twenty-two is more hope, than a speaker's rhetorical manipulation. He is forced into the outrageous claim that "their" book will safeguard civilization.²¹⁰ But she is the writer, and in the progression of "Schools might learn sciences, spheres music, angels verse" (26), writing is the highest pursuit.

He tries to transfer any power he sought to have over her, to the book itself.²¹¹ Each of the following three stanzas will begin with a focus on the book, and start with "Here":

²¹⁰ Janet Mueller argues Donne's extravagant comparisons are especially apposite in the valedictory poems, as the lovers are so far removed. The catachresis Donne employs certainly takes the poetry beyond the "dull" and "sublunary." Janet Mueller, "Women Among the Metaphysicals": A Case, Mostly of Being Donne For," *Modern Language Notes*, 87 (1989): 142-158.

²¹¹ This is recognized in the alternative title some of the manuscripts give to this poem, which proclaim "A Valediction: To the Book." Patrides accepts "Valediction to his booke" in his 1985 edition of Donne's poetry (Patrides, *Complete Poems*, 75-77). I have previously noted the difficulties the naming of Donne's poems presents, and have here accepted the most commonly used title. For

Here Love's divines (since all divinity
 Is love or wonder) may find all they seek:
 Whether abstract, spiritual love they like,
 Their souls exhaled with what they do not see (28-31)

The speaker feels that things don't need to be seen to be proven. Crane's observation of the importance of the imagination here extends Iser's work as it might apply to Donne's poetry.²¹² Knowing lovers can look beyond the "gay cov'rings" of books to the mystery beneath, as the hopeful swain claimed in "To His Mistress Going to Bed," and beyond appearance, as the more astute swain demonstrated in "The Comparison." Now, this awareness is more nuanced, and there is a move towards a genuine acceptance of the other, as a mystery beyond understanding.

Attempts to codify love, as lawyers do who see women as property to be traded, evoke the biographical troubles that Donne and Anne experienced in the early days of their marriage. And some books are more powerful than others. Ironically, those who pursue legalistic, written truths, think their world-view is solid. It is not so. It is the legalistic pedant who is pursuing "Chimeras" (45): it is only the mystery of genuine love that reveals the truth. Politicians, even those who can read, will also fail to understand the true meaning of the mystery that her love

Downs-Gamble, the title one posits for this poem is critical. She feels "Valediction of the Book" "relegates the female to passive subjectivity," while "Valediction to his Book" "relinquishes patriarchal authority and promotes mutuality." (Downs-Gamble, "Marking 'dark eclipses,'" 285) Closer attention to voice suggests that the former title does not negate her latter observation.

²¹² Crane relates this idea to the dramatic changes science in the early modern period was making to conceptual parameters. See especially, her example of the difficulty some observers had in accepting what Galileo could see through his telescope. Crane, "Analogy, Metaphor, and the New Science: Cognitive Science and Early Modern Epistemology," in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Liza Zunshine, (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 108-109.

book will encompass. To construct a love-world based on gendered power and rhetorical facility, is no real love-world at all. A study of this book that the speaker's lover is writing will prove it:

In this thy book, such will their nothing see,
As in the Bible some can find out alchemy. (53-54)

It is not just the book that is important; it must be read correctly. The Bible, especially, can be misread. It is the speaker now who learns most from the poem, whose own voice leads him to accept the more powerful role his woman is playing. Her "annals" will be honest, and will contain and address the problems of the limited lovers of stanza four ("Faith's infirmity"), the "subsidies" misguided lawyers expend in stanza five, and the "alchemy" or false magic some are wont to see in stanza six. Inexorably, his voice leads him to an understanding of her worth, of the role she can play, and the response he must adopt. It is the voice that bears the truth, not the source from which it comes. The "I" and "thou" of the opening line of the poem, are very different from the "I" and "thee" here:

Thus vent thy thoughts; abroad I'll study thee,
As he removes far off that great height takes:
How great love is, presence best trial makes,
But absence tries how long this love will be: (55-58)

He may move away from her, but this forces him to re-evaluate her worth. Indeed, she becomes the text. She has the power. Now there is the implied threat that

during his absence, she may decide to be inconstant; he is the one who will have to accommodate this fear. Unlike "The Canonization," where the lovers are a union to be invoked, here she is still writing the book, and he may well hope he will be her only reader. The tone of this poem is personal. If the speaker is Donne, then Donne's journey is much more than a trip away; it is an excursion into inner doubt that accompanies his acceptance of Anne's worth. Stubbs refers to "A Valediction of the Book" as "His poem for Ann."²¹³ Haskin suggests the poem was specifically directed to Anne, but that at the same time Donne "had in mind other readers beyond the addressee."²¹⁴ What Donne presents to his readers at the end of the poem is a speaker who is forced to reassess his own position.

As with "The Ecstasy," the poem ends with a depiction of love that is beyond the speaker's ability to fathom:

To take a latitude
 Sun or stars are fitliest viewed
 At their brightest, but to conclude
 Of longitudes, what other way have we
 But to mark when and where the dark eclipses be? (59-63)

Donne situates his acceptance of the mystery of love, in an introductory truth. Latitude is a known. But longitude is an uncertain realm.²¹⁵ He joins his lover in her annals, in the plural "we," and in the concluding rhyme of "we"/"be." He progresses

²¹³ Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 248.

²¹⁴ Haskin, "Love Lyric," 199,

²¹⁵ Captain James Cook was to play an important role in the "discovery" of how to correctly gauge longitude, some one hundred and sixty years later. For a poetic assessment of his achievement, see Kenneth Slessor's "Five Visions of Captain Cook."

in this final stanza from being an individual who moves away to study her, to being united with her in the mystery of love, no matter how despairing that might be. The glib introductory tone has gone, and he now accepts her guidance and worth, and the power her pen imparts. The point Iser makes in discussing Sidney's *Arcadia* is apposite here: "... neither mask nor person is ever totally present, and the continual alternation between presence and absence indicates that the person always extends beyond what, at any moment, he is."²¹⁶ Donne's lovers are joined inside the possibilities of the written word.

Harvey says that "... only women can legitimately speak for themselves, because only they have access to their own experience."²¹⁷ But voice can be constructed such that it comes not only from the speaker, but also emerges from ourselves, and our own understanding of what must fill the space. So it is in "Valediction: Of the Book." Some separations, such as that from Magdalen Herbert, might be sought. But separation from a loved one is more problematic. Here the speaker can no longer hide behind self-delusion, and is forced to accommodate his lover's more powerful capacity.

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This study focuses on the *Elegies*, and the *Songs and Sonnets*. It addresses the concerns of Jack, rather than Doctor Donne. But the division between the rakish lover and the devout divine, is not clear-cut. For Donne, life was not as simple as turning from love poetry when Anne dies, to embrace a love of God as

²¹⁶ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 75.

²¹⁷ Harvey, *Voices*, 12.

her replacement. Garrod claims he began writing his divine poems in 1607.²¹⁸ Robbins dates the religious sonnet "Show me, dear Christ" from the 1590s, and the poems he includes as "Divine Meditations" at 1609-1610.²¹⁹ Clearly, Donne wrote "Good Friday: Made as I was Riding Westward that Day" in 1613. In the midst of writing some of his most erotic and passionate love poetry, Donne also (erotically) considers his relationship with God. Anne did not die until August 1617, but when she did, Donne felt the loss deeply.²²⁰ The poetic balance of intermixed genders he achieves at the end of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning"²²¹ is not enough; she could not be contained forever in a poem. But there is a poem that tries to accept her loss, and brings concerns for the continuation of both worldly and spiritual love together. It provides a fitting conclusion to this work. It is the final poem in the 1633 edition of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*.²²² Guibbory suggests it was the last poem Donne wrote: it is "To Christ."²²³

The opening appeal to God makes this more like a prayer, than a hymn.²²⁴

The concern for endings and beginnings evokes the last line of "A Valediction

²¹⁸ Garrod, "Mrs. Herbert," 173.

²¹⁹ Robbins, *Poems*, 463, 520.

²²⁰ Anne died of complications attendant upon the birth of her twelfth child. See Stubbs, *Reformed Soul*, 328-331.

²²¹ Susannah B. Mintz provides some historical perspective for Donne's melding of genders.

(Susannah B. Mintz, "'Forget the Hee and Shee': Gender and Play in John Donne," *Modern Philology* 98:4 (May, 2001): 600. She feels, however, that rather than suggesting a merged unity, the fact that the woman moves as part of the compass, creates a fear that the woman may be inconstant. (599).

²²² Donne was ordained as a priest on 23rd January, 1615. After this he only wrote some seven hundred lines of poetry. More than half of this output was accounted for by "The Lamentations of Jeremy, for the most part according to Tremellius." (Robbins, *Poems*, 587-609.) General consensus dates this poem at 1625, when the plague was worsening. Of the roughly 700 lines of poetry Donne wrote after Anne's death, "Lamentations" consumes 390. Poems that are not purely religious, and which continue to explore Donne's tussle between worldly and divine love, are special. Anne's death prompted a return for Donne to the poetic form in "Since she whom I loved," "At the Seaside, going over with the Lord Doncaster into Germany, 1619," and in "To Christ," which Robbins dates as the most likely of the three to be written last. See Robbins, *Poems*, 575-576.

²²³ Achsah Guibbory, "Donne and apostasy," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 676.

The title of this poem is (as are so many others of Donne), problematic; it is also known as "A Hymne to God the Father." I have accepted Robbins' contention that "it is always Christ who is seated in judgement." (*Poems*, 576). Donne agreed. Note his *Sermons*, i, 255, and ii, 195, 204, 290.

²²⁴ This poem was transposed into an anthem by John Hilton. According to Walton, Donne particularly enjoyed listening to it. See Helen Wilcox, "Devotional Writing," in *The Cambridge*

Forbidding Mourning," but the woman to whom Donne was returning has now been dead for some time. This is Donne's final attempt to put his love journey in perspective:

Wilt thou forgive that sin were I begun,
 Which is my sin, though it were done before?
 Wilt thou forgive those sins through which I run,
 And do them still though still I do deplore?
 When thou hast done, thou hast not Donne,
 For I have More. (1-6)

This poem holds more multiplicities of meaning than any of the poems so far explored. Julian Lamb notes the distinction between the knowledge the speaker's voice exhibits, and the deeper underlying awareness Donne is exploring.²²⁵ As in previous poems, the voice of the speaker can be quite different from the voice of the poet. The purposeful ambiguity of the opening lines refers both to the sinful beginnings of all, and the personal sins of the speaker. The speaker tries to distance himself from the sin by claiming he is not the only perpetrator, and that his sin has been "done before." In a conversation with God, such rhetorical attempts to avoid making an honest recompense are doomed to fail. Donne is facing a much more nuanced challenge than the speaker in "The Bracelet." The poetry in "To Christ" is much more than a societal observation; it is the means whereby Donne can move closer to God. He does so inside the layered meanings

Companion to John Donne, ed. Achsah Guibbory, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 166, n. 11.

²²⁵ Julian Lamb, "Aspects, Physiognomy," 164-165.

the punning poetry provides. The punning is a vehicle for honest confessions, and exists beyond the speaker's control.

Donne's life has been a long and challenging journey. The verbs "begun" (1) and "run" (3) capture this. The journey continues; Donne tries to put Anne's death and his unending sense of loss in perspective. The punning on the repeated "still" (4) reflects the tension: he is "still" in love with the flesh, and if his physical journey has ended, to be "still" is a loss to be deplored. He is asking God to "still" and quieten those physical urges, and he will continue to "still" deplore them, (and "still" miss them), even after God has intervened. The speaker admits that if God has finished trying to save him, has "done" (5) with him as a cause not worth the extra effort, then God does not have Donne at all, and Donne still has Anne More. Donne is irrevocably wedded to Anne ("have" (6) evokes the wedding vow), and even after all these years, he misses her so much that even God cannot fill the void.²²⁶

Donne's awareness of his love journey, and his concomitant rejection of God, continues to be examined. The difference between the speaker, and Donne, disappears. It is now Donne's honesty before God that emerges:

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
 Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
 Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
 A year or two, but wallowed in a score?

²²⁶ David J. Leigh posits that as Donne and Anne are inextricably linked in these last lines of the opening stanza, that if Donne is to be saved by God, Anne will have to be saved too. (David J. Leigh, "Donne's 'A Hymne to God the Father: New Dimensions,'" *Studies in Philology*, 75:1 (Winter, 1978): 90.

When thou hast done, thou hast not Donne,²²⁷

For I have more.

(7-12)

Donne has certainly encouraged others to revel in the physical, stressed the importance of the body, and elevated a transcendent love to the status of a religion. Since Anne's death he has "shunned" physical contact, but his desire still separates him from God. He admits he "wallowed" in his love for Anne, and this suggestion of animalistic excess is far removed from the fineness of the compass image. God is exhorted to be a more active participant; again, the truth lies in the pun. God only has the weakest part of Donne, that part that merits only the lower case. As God had been challenged in "Batter my heart,"²²⁸ here too he will have to do more if he is to supplant Anne. But God is getting closer to Donne; the More he clung to at the end of the first stanza is, at the end of the second stanza, not the woman, but rather a sense of her worth. Donne's aching memory of her still has to be supplanted by the poet's immersion in God.

The final stanza is the end point of Donne's poetic journey. The progression of "I begun" (1) and "I run" (3) ends in his admission that "I've spun" (13) poetic threads that have to be discarded:

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun

My last thread, I shall perish on the shore:

Swear by thyself that at my death this Sun

²²⁷ I have followed Robbins in this spelling. The coterie were well used to Donne punning on both his and Anne's names. The progression from their proper names to the "ordinary" use of "done" and "more" reflects Donne's final acceptance of Anne's death, his subsequent loss of individuality, and his final melding into God's care.

²²⁸ Robbins, *Poems*, 553-555.

Shall shine as it shines now and heretofore;

And, having done that, thou hast done,

I have no more.²²⁹

(13-18)

Leigh considers the variants of the final line that appears in the manuscripts, and feels most comfortable with "I fear no more." But the base text Robbins has chosen, with the final line as "I have no more," captures a depth of loss, even in the midst of God's love, which best suits the tensions the poem explores. The concern in Donne's voice strips him to the core. Iser sees the anthropological importance of such a move: "Staging in literature makes conceivable the extraordinary plasticity of human beings ... [who] can expand into an almost unlimited range of culture-bound patternings."²³⁰ For Iser, literature is a panorama of what is possible, and what is possible is evolving. This is not the constructed speaker of the first stanza, trying to distance himself from true repentance. Donne goes beyond his acceptance of personal inadequacies, to contemplate God's inadequacies. There is no point in Donne pledging his troth to God. Rather, God has to pledge both his interest in Donne, and his ability to save him. Donne has moved in this poem, through the punning, to stand before God as an honest sinner. He resorts to the most commonplace pun on Sun/Son to show God the way. The difference between "Sun" and "sin" is, as the difference between "now" and "no" in the opening stanza of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," simply a letter. What drives Donne in the valedictory poem is love: what drives him in "To Christ," is fear. This is not the fear of the earlier *Songs and Sonnets* that a physical love may not last forever, and continue on, even beyond death; it is now the fear that Christ will be unable to save him, and will leave him to "perish on the shore." Donne's poetic voice has been

²²⁹ Leigh, "Hymne to God," n. 20, 92.

²³⁰ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, xviii.

honed over many years, and here that voice explores his deepest self. The punning continues, and the poem's final "done" (17) suggests both that God's work is over when God can convince Donne of the truth of his salvation, and that Donne has now melded with God, and God "hast" him all to himself. Although the final "more" is lower case, there remains the incredible sense of loss that Donne feels. That he has "no more" may be a necessary step for him to take, if he is to ever enter Heaven. In an earlier poem, "Since she whom I lov'd," written closer to Anne's death, Donne is able to say her death was "to hers and my good." (2).²³¹ However, the passage of time has not quenched the loss, but exacerbated it. Such dismissal is not possible in "To Christ." It is, even all these years after Anne's death, a loss that is still agonisingly painful, and a step that remains uncertain. Donne's voice, and the poetry that gives it a stage, is more powerful here than it was in his more youthful primal scream at the end of "Sappho to Phileanis." "To Christ" has a maturity that accepts what Donne can hardly bear to accept. Elizabeth M. A. Hodgson suggests that Donne's concern for Anne in "To Christ" is really a concern for the criminal bride, the "feeble and enfeebling wife."²³² In the light of my reading of Donne's voice, this is not a view with which I can agree. "To Christ" is not a poem that simply blames Anne for keeping Donne from God but rather, through voice, explores the delicate and painful balance between two competing and powerful loves.

²³¹ Robbins, *Poems*, 572-575.

²³² Elizabeth M. A. Hodgson, *Gender and the Sacred Self in John Donne*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 110.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Voices forge a life inside and outside the poem.

Just as first words provide an interesting place to revisit, and locate the genesis of Donne's major concerns and motifs, so final words also demand close attention. After Anne's death, Donne wrote very little poetry. His muse, the impetus for so much of his love poetry, was gone. The movement towards God could now proceed apace. The personal involvement demanded of Donne, was now better suited to the genre of the sermon. What "To Christ" leaves us with is Donne's honest exposure before God; his voice here is the real end point of the poetry of personal doubt, and the agony of loss that voice captures is the conclusion of a worldly love which had been both his "all" and his "more."

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Donne releases voices in his poetry. They circulate in a world that has been prepared to hear them, and educated to assess them. It is not only ventriloquised voices that are set free: inside the poem, between the lines and the stanzas, and

outside the poem, in the reader's continued engagement, the reader interacts with voices. Donne provides the spaces in which his readers can extend their view of, and involvement in, the world. But such "literary anthropology" not only facilitates a reader's response. It also provides a space in which the poet can play, and imagine, and work to establish his own place in a challenging world.

The elegiac genre, with its contemporary Ovidian overtones, allows Donne to explore the concept of a woman, and the prospect of what a love "mixed equally" might look like. What each poem is about is interesting. But what each poem "does" is more important. When he started writing, Donne had no clear poetic path to follow. However, there are major ideas and images that recur, and always it is voices that lead him on.

In the *Elegies*, Donne positions himself above his characters, watching them negotiate the world he inhabits. He is both of this world, and beyond it. In "The Bracelet" he releases voices the reader might judge, and makes dismissive references to Kyd's poetry in passing, to poetry where voice is more rhyme than reader involvement. In "To His Mistress Going to Bed," the voices are more complex. The young seducer reveals much more about himself than he ever intended, and the reader is positioned to distinguish between a vocal display, and a vocal truth. It is Donne's depiction of the imagined voice, the strength of the unspeaking mistress, which impresses. Such strength of voice develops in "Love's Pupil." Here, yet another woman is the touchstone by which a man will measure himself. Donne goes further in this poem, and posits that there is a "mystic" love that should be pursued. This insight, once released, develops and becomes a central concern. The woman here is strong: she is capable of learning any rhetorical lesson, and possesses an emotional depth that demands more from a

relationship than either a selfish husband, or an inadequate male lover, can provide. "The Comparison" takes Donne in a more definite direction. He is more aligned to the speaker in this poem, and we hear voices questioning odious comparisons, and see stereotypes that prohibit a love that values a woman. Donne plays with language here, stretching similes and metaphors to breaking point. The two women addressed by the swains are in the poem, and it is made clear at the end what any successful lover will need to do. The speaker, in his avalanche of examples, shows women need to be treated well, and respected for what they are, rather than as a false male construct. Rhetorical manipulation is eschewed, and a need to look beyond the outward appearance is affirmed. Again, the coterie is presented with voices to assess. It is here that, for the first time, Donne almost loses control of those voices. They exist at the edge of linguistic practice, and point to a development we will see in his later poetry. Any misogyny we have seen so far is undercut by the failure of the speaker, and the clear sense that it is not the path to a fulfilling relationship.

If voices cannot be trusted and controlled, then feelings, stripped of gender limitations, might be a space worth exploring. In "Sappho to Philaenis" Donne speaks as Sappho, and rejects his poetic ability and masculinity. But it is not an exact sameness that will guarantee unending, all consuming love. Within the safety of an Ovidian context, and the expectations of a female poetic lament, Donne still stretches poetic boundaries, and crafts the first lesbian poem in English. Here, Donne's speaker is an intermediary, who tests the ground before the poet himself is prepared to step forth. Such attempts to distance himself from overwhelming emotion fail: Anne's presence cannot be erased, and Donne's despairing cry sounds out in:

O cure this loving madness, and restore

Me to me: thee, my half, my all, my more. (57-58)

This poem raises problems Donne is still to work through.

If the elegiac genre has been exhausted as a way to explore intense personal feelings, then the possibilities *Songs and Sonnets* offer might prove more fulfilling. "The Flea," although a witty exercise rather than a deep personal exploration, points the way much of Donne's love journey will progress. What he offers the woman here is not only his wit, but also the prospect of a shared existence, contained in a secluded, small world. Most importantly, he brings the woman onto his stage; she is the key player, involved in the action, and accorded the intellectual ability to follow and respond to a complicated argument. She makes the final decision, outside the poem. This is an ongoing voice the reader is positioned to hear.

Donne's female speaker in "Woman's Constancy" extends the conception of what a woman can offer any man prepared to surrender control, and accept a unified existence. Her voice here is both heard clearly, and imagined. Her awareness and control of rhetoric is impressive, and something she has learned. What is important is her vision of a possible love world beyond rhetorical manipulation, and her preparedness to go there. This is proffered in the space between the last two lines of the poem; both readers, and those whose lives are bounded within the poem, have to pay close attention. The poetic movement here is from *doing*, to *speaking*, to *thinking*. Voice has to make something thoughtful happen. In exploring the female voice, Donne is examining both sides of the

argument — *in utramque partem* — in his poetic quest for what a mutual love might look like. Here it is her voice that leads him on, and encourages him to take a loving leap of faith.

In a world of often undated, and mostly untitled manuscripts, it is hard to relate specific poems to specific biographical events. But the punning on "done" and "more" in "Sappho to Philaenis" clearly situates that poem, and Donne's tumultuous marriage situates "The Canonization." Here is his explanation of a love for which he was prepared to surrender his every advantage. And it is the androgynous union of the lovers in their plural pronoun that is so effective. They become "one neutral thing" that can "die and rise the same," and can attain a spiritual purity, even in the physical, when they "prove/ Mysterious by this love." Yet this is a poetic sleight of hand; to live inside the poem, and reject calls to try to rejoin the courtly world, cannot be a poetic end-point. In "The Ecstasy," Donne moves more towards a personal, philosophical exploration of his love. The presence of the observer justifies Donne's love decisions: he is a "refined" observer, notes the primacy of the body, and understands "soul's language." Donne is explaining his love as much to himself, as to others present. The speaker's love is beyond "sex," and is again an androgynous melding of souls:

Love these mixed souls doth mix again,

And makes both one, each this and that. (34-36)

Again too, the lovers are combined in the plural personal pronoun, and the mysterious nature of their love elevates it to the purity of a religion. Donne, in the image of the transplanted violets, sidesteps what the speaker's voice cannot

capture. Donne's own voice will have to be more evident, and his pain more real, for the reader to hear complete honesty.

Until now, Donne had used poetry to explore his world. With "The Relic," he uses poetry to defend it. Previously, love prospects existed within the poem, and those prospects increasingly centred on Anne. Now the poem provides a space for another real woman to contemplate. Anne's secure place is momentarily relegated to prose (she was "lov'd most"), and Magdalen Herbert faces the poetic journey that transcends sex to achieve the real miracle of heavenly certitude. Importantly here, it is the imagination, and not the body, to which Donne appeals. The imagination is still a mystery, and it is not until the later "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" that Donne will find a way of finding as concrete an example as a pair of compasses to prove his love.

"A Valediction: Of the Book" again shows the limitations of rhetoric to manipulate any love in which at least one of the partners genuinely cares for the other. Words lead the speaker on; they run ahead of him and force him to admit that she can write well, and that his attempts to focus on the power of the book, rather than her power as a writer, must fail. He is forced to face the honesty of her "annals"; she is the book from which he needs to read, and from which he must learn. The poem ends with a question about the "dark eclipses," and the question draws the reader into the poem to consider both the speaker's doubtful position, and to contemplate his own.

"A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is the apex of Donne's love certainty. In hindsight, it seems all his love poems were destined to culminate here. Observers now are not needed to justify their love, but are rather peripheral. The words for which Sappho had reached, and the prospect the female speaker in

"Woman's Constancy" had evoked between the lines, are captured in the compass image. The drawing of the circle is an active process, and much more than a simple picture of a circle already created; both lovers are working towards an erotic reunion.²³³ But it is in the pronouns that Donne cements his mutual love. Beyond the oft used union in the plural pronoun, here they remain individuals, but individuals beyond the gender limitations that so much of Donne's earlier poetry has explored. She now has the "firmness," he the "circle."²³⁴ This is not the insult the failed love tutor tried to ascribe to his recalcitrant pupil, but a state of mutual certainty. The final line returns Donne to the gentle coupling with which the poem begins, and to the loving, balanced perfection of a pre-Fall Eden.

When Donne turns to the genre of the sermon, after his ordination in 1615, the words and images of his earlier poems do not die; they resurface, seemingly too powerful for either priest or Dean to ignore. The "rags of time" from "The Sun Rising" reappear to contrast with the eternity of God,²³⁵ the transplanted multiplying flower in "The Ecstasy" is recalled in his commemorative sermon for Lady Danvers,²³⁶ and the compass of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" appears in God's hands, when God "carries his compass round, and shuts up where he began."²³⁷ And Donne continues his belief in the necessity of gender fluidity in his contemplations of the divine. In a sermon preached to Queen Anne at Denmark House, some four months after his wife's death, he notes:

²³³ Crane explores this movement in the context of scientific attitudes exhibited by the early moderns. Crane, "Analogy and New Science," 103-114.

²³⁴ There has been some discussion about who is the speaker of this poem. Wisam Mansour argues "the speaker in the poem is a woman who attempts to seduce her male partner into consenting to her roaming freely away from him." Wisam Mansour, "Gender Ambivalence in Donne's 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,'" *English Language Notes*, 42:4, (June, 2005): 19.

²³⁵ Donne, *Sermons*, vi, 170.

²³⁶ Donne, *Sermons*, viii, 87.

²³⁷ Donne, *Sermons*, viii, 97.

To shew the constancy and durableness of this love, the lover is
 a he, that is Christ; to show the vehemency and earnestness of it,
 the lover is a shee, that is wisdom ... all that is god then, either in
 the love of man or woman is in this love; for he is expressed in
 both senses, man and woman; and all that can be ill in the love of
 either sex, is purged away, for the man is no other man then
 Christ Jesus, and the woman is no other woman, then wisdom
 her self, even the uncreated wisdom of God himself.²³⁸

Donne's love for his wife could not be contained in the sermons. It emerges most
 forcefully, years after Anne's death. The speaker is led by a poetic voice he cannot
 stop. Voice had always been important for Donne. As a preacher, he recognises the
 dramatic impact it needs to have:

It is not the depth, nor the wit, nor the eloquence of the
 Preacher that pierces us, but his nearnesse; that hee speaks
 to my conscience, as though he had been behinde the hangings
 when I sinned ...²³⁹

This image of standing behind the gibbet, is powerful. But it is not as powerful as
 the final voice that speaks in "To Christ." Here, Donne's voice is an awful honesty, a
 confusion about the power Anne still has over him all these years later. The
 unfathomable sense of her loss, even standing before God, almost overwhelms

²³⁸ Donne, *Sermons*, i, 239.

²³⁹ Donne, *Sermons*, iii, 142.

him. It is punning in the voice that allows Donne to encompass a lost love for Anne, and a developing love for God. It is God's voice that will guide Donne into heaven:

Though I be dead, I shall heare the voice; The sounding of the
voice, and the working of the voice shall be all one; and all shall
rise there in a lesse Minute, then any one dies here.²⁴⁰

Male and female voices in Donne's poetry engage and guide both poet and reader, and the drama these voices provide presents a poetic space in which the possibilities of life can be explored. As Iser argues, staging "allows us ... to lure into shape the fleetingness of the possible, and to monitor the continual unfolding of ourselves into possible otherness."²⁴¹ This is "literary anthropology." And it is voices, both heard and imagined, that make both poet and reader contemplate worlds just beyond their ability to grasp. It is voices, both heard and imagined, that liberate both male and female, and explore what a mutual and constant love might be.

²⁴⁰ John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, together with Death's Duel*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 15.

²⁴¹ Iser, *Fictive and Imaginary*, 303.

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