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Narcissus in the other: John Donne, woman and the dynamics of recognition

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Rice University, 1993

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NARCISSUS IN THE OTHER: 
JOHN DONNE, WOMAN AND THE 
DYNAMICS OF RECOGNITION 

by 

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A THESIS SUBMITTED 
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE 
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE 
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY 

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE 

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Houston, Texas 
April, 1993
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1993
ABSTRACT

Narcissus in the Other:
John Donne, Woman and the
Dynamics of Recognition

by

Steve Larocco

John Donne's amorous poetry, from his most rapt paeans to mutual love to his crassest, most misogynous elegies, displays a pervasive desire for recognition. Much recent criticism of Donne's work has interpreted this desire as a masculine will-to-power which seeks to fashion or preserve an identity by staging verbal mastery over women and by soliciting the homosocial adulation of men. The love poetry, in this view, derives from a narcissistic drive for omnipotence and prestige which has been foiled and redirected by the stratified structure and historicity of Donne's social world. Shaping this analysis is an implicit assumption that the desire for recognition is the same as a will-to-power which finds its gratification only through the incessant imposition of hierarchical relations between the self and the other. As in the first stage of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, the self achieves recognition solely through domination. Donne's desire for recognition, however, is not founded on such a need for domination. Rather, it is the source of what I call a dream of symmetry. This dream, rooted in the intersubjective dynamics of early childhood, stems from the desire to engage with a powerful
other who is attuned to and mirrors the desires of the self. In
Donne's work, the dream of symmetry surfaces explicitly in
Donne's great poems of mutual love where the twinning of eyes
and tropes of mirroring suggest metonymically a more
fundamental twinning of desires. This dream also drives Donne's
rhetoric of seduction where the poet-seducer's primary wish is to
induce a recalcitrant other to mimic his (or her) desires. Only
when this dream of symmetry is troubled by the very
subjectivity of the other which the dream itself requires or when
the pleasures of mirroring yield to sexual anxieties does the
desire for recognition begin to produce a misogynous rhetoric of
power. It is in such moments, and only in such moments, that
Donne descends into a poetics of domination and death in which
the dream of symmetry slides beneath assertions of power and
the desire for recognition loses its intersubjective savor.
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Beginnings: Woman, Donne
and the Desire for Recognition

In early December of 1601 John Donne carried out a fateful decision. Though mindful of the fact that he lived in a society in which social position exerted a powerful and often domineering influence over interpersonal relations, particularly amongst the upper classes, he eloped with Anne More, knowing full well that Anne's father, George, would not approve of the marriage. In fact, had More gotten wind of the marriage before its execution, he would have barred its occurrence. After the ceremony, Donne was so fearful of his father-in-law's reaction that he waited two months to tell him, and then did so only in a letter.\(^1\) Part of Donne's problem was that he did not possess the social standing to marry Anne. George More was a wealthy country gentleman who had been knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1598 and whose social position vastly, vastly exceeded Donne's. As Donne himself admitted in the letter that disclosed the marriage to his new father-in-law: "I knew my present state less than fit for her."\(^2\)

The marriage was also transgressive in other ways.\(^3\) By choosing to marry clandestinely, Donne and his young wife (she was still a minor) had flouted George More's paternal authority, making a decision that was traditionally the prerogative of
fathers (or, at times, both parents). They had done so, as Donne himself rather audaciously wrote, because "to have given any intimation of it had been to impossibilitate the whole matter." Secretly but defiantly, they had refused to submit their desires to the fetters of paternal will or social custom.

More's response was emphatic and punitive. Though English law would not allow him to dissolve the marriage, he had Donne arrested, and demanded that Donne's employer, Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, dismiss him. Egerton himself, to a certain extent, had been compromised by the pairing. Donne had met Anne while she was residing at York House, Egerton's home. As the niece of Egerton's second wife, she had been, at various times and for various reasons, entrusted by her father to Egerton's care. The marriage therefore implicitly sullied the Lord Keeper's performance as Anne's guardian and "chaperone." Consequently, even though Egerton apparently liked Donne, he reluctantly gave in to More's outrage. Donne was dismissed. As it turned out, this act dashed any chance that Donne had for preferment at court, even in other capacities. His willingness to breach authority had made him suspect for civil employment. Seven years later, when Lord Hay mentioned Donne to King James, the king remembered Donne mainly through his "disorderlie proceedings." As Donne later stated in a telling letter to his friend Henry Wotten: "I dyed at a blow then when my courses were diverted . . . ." He had risked and, as the remainder of his life would prove, ultimately sacrificed his opportunity for social
advancement at court in order to secure his partnership with a woman. He had chosen to privilege attachment to Anne More above social protocol, and paid what was for him a very steep price.

Donne's behavior was not without precedent, however. R. C. Bald notes that a similar case had occurred the year before with perhaps even more dire consequences for the parties involved. But it was atypical. Few contemporary gentlemen in Donne's position would have jeopardized their social standing to consummate a marriage that would inevitably be perceived as a feckless act of insubordination; few contemporary gentlemen would have risked losing the recognition and approval of their superiors in order to license a transgressive alliance with a particular woman. The impudent character of Donne's marriage, then, suggests that he had a peculiarly strong investment in ensuring his pairing with Anne. His ardent interest in her moved him to ill-considered acts of defiance, acts which compromised both his actual and his desired place within the political and social order. In a sense, his love took precedence over his ambition (and, perhaps, his judgment). In the complicated array of motivations that produced the marriage, Anne's appeal, at least briefly, assumed priority.

The point of reciting this story, however, is not to suggest any simple or facile relation between Donne's life and his poetry concerning women. The complications, deformations and mediations that pass between art and personal history ensure
that poetry can never simply reflect life. As contemporary theorists have relentlessly argued, poetic enunciation always involves acts of dissimulation. Lexical, metric, generic, political and other conventions and constraints impose their own order on whatever poetry can say or attempt to say. Nonetheless, in spite of these caveats, I would like to point out that during at least one critical juncture in Donne's life, his desire to pair with a woman, with a particular other, led him to slight class distinctions and social decorum and attempt to contract the world to consummate his desires. His marriage to Anne, with all its presumptions and risks, suggests the power of his wish to secure a binary relation with a woman, that is, a relation in which pairing with the other tends to override or at least muffle social, political, familial and historical pressures and influence.

Arthur Marotti has argued in a recent, influential study of Donne that Donne's interest in woman, particularly as articulated in his poetry, was shaped and controlled by his social, economic and political environment--by the pervasive force of Donne's historical milieu. He emphasizes that the primary focus of Donne's love poetry is not on the imaginary woman addressed in the poems, but rather on a coterie of male readers who, upon reading the poem, would respond favorably to its verve, sentiments and wit. Each poem, for Marotti, functions in a sense as a social transaction rather than as a means of lyric expression or revelation. Circulated only in manuscript to a carefully chosen audience, the poems, according to Marotti, were
designed to affirm civil bonds with like-minded men (or to secure patronage). Their focus, to use the language of Eve Sedgwick, was predominantly homosocial rather than heterosexual. Yet Donne's troublesome marriage tends to show that history itself is equivocal. For precisely when his career was slowly advancing, precisely when he stood to garner maximum advantage from homosocial alliances, Donne chose to act in a way which emphasized his heterosexual interests rather than his homosocial ones. He chose to sanction his desire for one woman rather than carefully and seductively to cultivate his affiliations and negotiate his conflicts with men.

Such an intense, often binding, interest in woman is the subject of much of Donne's amorous poetry. This interest, however, does not appear in the poetry in any unmediated or straightforward manner. Donne's verse does not reflect his life. The tendency in the Songs and Sonets and even in the Elegies to focus on amorous relations and to veil, neglect, or even exclude the register of political and economic life and the ambition which informs it is not the same as choosing to flout paternal and social authority and custom at the behest of a compelling desire to pair with a female other. The desire for woman that manifests itself in Donne's marriage, a desire which never quite becomes clear, cannot begin to account for the involutions, complexities and fantasized, intersubjective dynamics which stage and direct amorous desire as it appears in his verse. In the poetry, desire is, in a sense, improvised; it only
masquerades as being real. Even the dramatic immediacy of a lyric such as *The Dreame* does not erase its status as a poem, as a performance. That is not to say, however, as Marotti suggests, that Donne's poetry merely uses women and desire as means to solicit forms of recognition from a predominantly male coterie audience. There is in Donne's poetry a desire to secure recognition, but its fulfillment, at least as anticipated by the poems themselves, is an effect of fantasized encounters with women. More to the point, even when Donne's poetic subject anticipates being observed or adored by third party observers as in *The Canonization*, *The Extasie*, or *The Relique*, his overriding concern remains with the imaginary woman, not with his (also imaginary) audience. Although Donne is always aware, it seems, of the potentially homosocial reception of his writings, he remains nonetheless captivated with the female other. The amorous desires manifested in the poetry are not simply a form of currency which he uses to secure recognition within a network of homosocial relations; rather, his verse manifests a more general struggle with the problem of recognition, a struggle which dominates much of Donne's amorous poetry.

Donne's involvement in the conflicts and pleasures of recognition is perhaps the one constant that pervades almost all of his poetry (even his divine poems), subtending his various and often cunning improvisations of wit and poetic voice. This preoccupation appears most appealingly in his poems of mutual love. In *The good-morrow*, for instance, a poem which subtly
attempts to dispel the poet's seemingly unwarranted fears of his lover's potential for infidelity, the Petrarchan convention of interlocked gazes leads the poet to an assertion of mutual enchantment. In the mirrors of his lover's eyes and the expressiveness of her face, the poet sees both a validation of his own appeal and an enthralling disclosure of his beloved's desire for him: "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,/ And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest" (15-16).25 Through the attentiveness and emotional attunement which registers in his lover's countenance, the poet assumes her recognition of him. She sees him, desires him and thereby confirms his value. His desire for her is mirrored by her desire for him. Each, in the other's face, in the other's heart, perceives his or her own desire reflected and affirmed. This mutual affirmation, perhaps, lies somewhere behind the declaration in The Anagram that "All love is wonder" (25).26

A crucial question, however, remains. What is the source of this wonder? Or, to put the question in another way, what is it that the poet sees when he looks in his lover's eyes? What is the source of his pleasure? Thomas Docherty, in his recent postmodern reading of Donne, suggests that "the lovers are imprisoned, cramped into the tiny space constituted in the crossing of their eyes . . . ."27 For Docherty, there is little pleasure in such mirroring, for he views the lovers' mutual captivation as a form of captivity. The problem, in Docherty's view, is that the lovers do not see or recognize each other in
their amorous gazes; instead, they merely use the other instrumentally as a mirror through which to see and affirm their own identities. They each use the other narcissistically: "The lovers reduce into the space of the glassy eye itself. This is the precise moment or scene of recognition, the moment of opening the eyes. But the problem is that in opening them simultaneously, they see only a reflection of the self, and not another person at all. The Other is entirely reduced and subsumed as a function of the Self's own self-recognition, self-constitution. The other becomes merely the instrumental mirror which allows the fractured subjectivity of the historical 'I' to cohere into an individuated entity . . . in this poem there is but one Self generated."28 I quote Docherty fairly extensively because he shares my sense that the scene is pervaded by a dynamics which involve recognition. Docherty, however, views these dynamics as occurring entirely within a narcissistic frame. When the poet looks into his lover's eyes, he sees only an image of himself--momentarily whole, coherent, individuated--and it is that reflected (and finally illusory) image that captivates him. Recognition, then, involves the other only insofar as the other can serve the self. The other is construed as instrumental rather than autonomous and, ultimately, in Docherty's analysis, disappears, effaced by the poet's overriding concern with the instability of historical process, change, and his own identity.29

Docherty, then, would see the wonder in love as issuing from historically (and verbally) generated insufficiencies in the self.
Narcissistic uses of the other (either as a mirror or as a "space" to be colonized\(^\text{30}\)) become the very tissue of love. Marotti, though writing from a very different theoretical position, echoes this interpretation, suggesting that Donne is often involved in a poetry of "phallic narcissism and of sexual adventure" which is the "anthithesis of polite, courtly verse."\(^{31}\) Donne's relation to the female other, however, though it does involve "self-recognition" and "self-constitution," to use Docherty's terms, is not necessarily framed or contained by narcissism. Instead, his poetry traces out a more complicated and other-oriented set of relations which issue from a desire for recognition by the other. In *The good-morrow,* the pleasure, the *wonder,* of seeing oneself in the other's eyes is an effect of emotional attunement and a sense of symmetry between one's own desires and those of a beloved other. The pleasure is, in a sense, mimetic, based on a pleasurable unison, on a *sharing,* of gazes. The metonymic movement from eyes to hearts that occurs in the quoted passage suggests, however, that this mimetic relation exceeds optics and instrumental reflection. Captivation and desire do not proceed only from an analogical relation between eyes and mirrors, but also from the framing of those mirrors in the face and heart, in the *context,* of an other. Recognition arises from the intermingling of what could be construed as narcissistic pleasures with the charisma of the other's desire. For Donne's poet, recognition and love require that the woman remain other even as she reflects his desire. He wishes, as *The good-morrow*
suggests, to perceive her desire not only in the mirrors of her eyes but also in the responsiveness of her face, in the intelligible unison of both of their desires. Recognition and love, for Donne, at least at times, involve intersubjective attunement as well as desires for narcissistic appropriation.  

The interplay between narcissistic interest in the other and the desire for recognition can be seen quite clearly in *Witchcraft by a picture*, a poem which draws on some of the same images and conventions as *The good-morrow*. In this poem, however, the enchantment of seeing oneself in the other's eyes proves threatening rather than gratifying. The reason for this reversal, it seems, is that the poem catches the poet and his beloved in a dramatic moment of parting or, perhaps, conflict, and not in the afterglow of consummated love as in *The good-morrow*. This possibility of loss and the poet's inklings of interpersonal dissonance apparently compels him to attend to possibilities of narcissistic wounding. He fears that his "picture," that image of himself which he reveres in the other, is on the verge of being destroyed:

```
I fixe mine eye on thine, and there
  Pitty my picture burning in thine eye,
My picture drown'd in a transparent teare,
  When I look lower I espie;
Hadst thou the wicked skill
By pictures made and mard, to kill,
How many ways mightst thou performe thy will?
```

(1-7)
The poet's interest in this stanza is almost entirely on two things: himself and his beloved's imaginary, magical power to make and mar reflections of him. Though the poet recognizes that the woman doesn't have the "wicked skill" to actually kill him by murdering his "pictures," he does dread her ability to annihilate the image of himself that he wishes to see in her. When he "fixes" his eye on her he hopes to perceive, as in The good-morrow, a reflection of himself cradled by his beloved's voluntary attunement of her desire to his. He hopes to be recognized as both the subject and object of her desire. What he actually sees, however, is quite different: the destruction of his "picture" in the fire and flood of her emotional unrest. Her sentiment, her subjectivity, intrudes on and threatens to obliterate the poet's desire for narcissistic reflection. As he must recognize when he sees his "burning picture" in her eye, she is not simply a glassy surface made to bear his image and mirror his desire, nor is she merely an instrumental means through which the poet can secure his own sense of self-possession. Instead, his beloved possesses a differing desire and will which responds to its own promptings and compunctions. For the poet, this otherness is potentially deadly since it means that the "picture" of himself that he desires in her must be submitted, in a sense, to her desire. His narcissistic investment in her is affected and to some extent controlled by her otherness. And it is this ability of the woman to destroy the poet's "picture" and thereby force him to recognize the will of an other that the poet
perceives as a murderous threat. In the otherness of the woman's tears, the poet sees only conflict, and imagines that conflict as being inherently aggressive.

The first stanza, then, seems to end in an impasse. The poet feels intensely threatened by his beloved's affect and will--her otherness. Her tears, which he imagines as a sign of her difference from him, possess the power both to engender and to destroy his "picture," and perhaps to destroy him. Because the poet and his lover are not the same, because he cannot perceive an unadulterated image of himself in her eyes, the poet imagines their relationship to be regulated by a spiral of threat and aggression rather than recognition or love. There is a remarkable and abrupt change in the poet's attitude, however, between stanzas. Suddenly, almost magically, as he begins the second stanza, the poet shifts from perceiving his beloved as a murderous threat to seeing her tears, her otherness, as a source of sustenance which can survive separation:

But now l've have drunke thy sweet salt teares,  
And though thou poure more I'll depart;  
My picture vanish'd vanish feares,  
That I can be endamag'd by that art;  
Though thou retain of mee  
One picture more, yet that will bee,  
Being in thine owne heart, from all malice free.  
(8-14)

As is often the case in Donne's poetry (for example, The Flea), consequential activity occurs in the interval between stanzas.
The poet states that he has "dunke" his beloved's "sweet salt teares," an act which seems to have radically changed his attitude towards his beloved. He himself draws attention to this change, beginning the stanza with the words "But now" to indicate both a temporal and dispositional break from the first stanza. The change is, in fact, startling, and seems to stem from the poet's recognition that the woman's tears, the signs of her potentially destructive otherness in the first stanza, have come to manifest her desire for him rather than aggression. Her eyes, which formerly had been construed as mirrors, have become fonts, figurative sources of nurturance. Though they remain the source of tears, they no longer adulterate the poet's narcissistic projections; rather, the woman's eyes offer the poet a "sweet, salt" balm which he can suckle. Significantly, these tears flow to excess. The poet's consumption of them does not debilitate or exhaust his beloved's store. Her weeping, a sign of her own attachment to him, continues beyond his temporary need. Momentarily, his demand for her is sated, and this seems to enable him to depart.

Psychoanalytically, this new, consumptive pleasure could be interpreted as regressive: Donne's poet abandons his unsettling attempt to frame his beloved as a mirror for his narcissistic, specular desires and instead welcomes the more archaic pleasures of suckling. By regressing, he removes himself from the conflicts and threats involved with being mirrored by an other: "My picture vanish'd, vanish feares . . . ." He removes
himself, perhaps, from the potential for aggressivity that Jacques Lacan has suggested is endemic to mirroring relations.\textsuperscript{33} According to Lacan, a child begins its life as a "body in pieces."\textsuperscript{34} The infant, in this view, is born with no coherence, no sense of self, no subjectivity. It experiences itself only as an array of fragments and sensations, as a welter of disarticulated phenomena with no corporeal or subjective unity. At about six months, however, all this begins to change. The child suddenly can overcome its sense of fragmentation by identifying with the form or visual \textit{gestalt} of an other: "The body in pieces finds its unity in the image of the other, which is its own anticipated image . . . ."\textsuperscript{35} The infant accomplishes this identification by using the other as a mirror through which to construct and recognize a unified image of itself.\textsuperscript{36} Because of its own incoherence, the infant is captivated by and wishes to assume the other's form. It therefore imagines that it is the same as the other and appropriates the other's visual image as its own.

For the child, according to Lacan, this identification is a source of jubilation. By framing its own identity through the image of the other, the child assumes (proleptically) mastery of its own body, and claims a certain psychic unity as well. It acquires what psychoanalysis calls an ego (an illusionary structure for Lacan). In order to do so, however, it must reduce the other to an instrument for its own identification. In a sense, it must annihilate the other as other in order to perceive it as an isomorphic version of itself.\textsuperscript{37} The reason for this perceptual
and cognitive violence is that such mirroring identification, as construed by Lacan, involves a fundamental paradox: in order to construct an ego, the child must see itself as being the same as the other; yet, in order to possess the (narcissistic) self-mastery that comes from such an identification, the child must not be the other, for to be the other means that the ego is not self-possessed, that it has no real propriety. To construct an ego, then, a child must become the other and yet remain autonomous--an impossibility for Lacan since the ego derives its claim to being from the other. In response to this inherent conflict, the ego construes the other as its rival rather than as its origin, for the ego's illusion of self-mastery requires that it not be dependent on the other. The construction of the ego, an act of self-recognition (and, for Lacan, misrecognition), requires therefore a passage through the other, but it involves a desire to annihilate the other as well.

This story of rivalry, however, is not necessarily Donne's story. When Donne's poet translates his beloved's eyes from mirrors to fonts he does not abandon mirroring relations as such, but rather exchanges one form of mirroring for another. In the first stanza, he wishes to imagine the other as an instrument of self-recognition. When the woman's tears prevent her from fulfilling that function, she becomes a fearsome rival, one whose potential for autonomy threatens the poet's narcissistically vested "pictures" of himself. She threatens his illusion of self-mastery. His solution to this vulnerability, however, does not
follow the path that Lacanian notions of rivalry would suggest. He does not try to dominate the other with increased aggression, nor does he submit to the other's desire. Instead, in the space between stanzas, he comes to recognize the other's tears not as a sign of autonomy which must be mastered but as nurturing manifestation of contingent responsiveness. Her tears thus come to signify her recognition of his value, and he very literally feeds off of that recognition. Crucially, this "feeding" eliminates his fear that the destruction of his mirror image is analogous to death: "My picture vanish'd, vanish feares,/ That I can be endamag'd by that art . . . ." His narcissistic dread over the fragility of his lover's eyes and tears as mirrors for self-recognition vanishes since he now can taste, in those same tears, her attachment to him. In a sense, her dependency as signified by her tears nurtures and ratifies his. Because she responds to him in a way which anticipates and reflects his own dependency, the potential destruction of his narcissistic projections (an illusion of autonomy generated by the instrumentalization of woman as mirror) can be tolerated. He does not need to destroy her, either rhetorically or psychologically, as Lacanian theory might suggest. Instead, he can relinquish his aggressivity because of his acceptance of her recognition of him. Through his lover's tears, the poet sheds narcissistic rivalry for a more intersubjective mode of recognition.

This new mode of intersubjectivity, however, does not eliminate the poet's wish for a "picture" to mediate and secure
his recognition by the other. That desire, however, does not belong to the poet alone. In the poem's final three lines, it is his lover whom he projects as holding and sustaining his "picture:"

"Though thou retaine of mee/ One picture more, yet that will bee,/ Being in thine owne heart, from all malice free." In the eyes of the poet, his lover supplements her tears with a less evanescent sign of her recognition of him: she retains his image in her heart, manifesting its significance to her. His recognition is assured because she carries his representative with her; it is her desire, not his alone, which is captivated with his visual form. Thus, by retaining his picture, she reflects his desire. Her desire and his converge; they appear to be the same. Yet, as the poet himself recognizes, such is not entirely the case. For the woman's imagined retention of the picture is not simply a mirroring of the poet's desire but also a subjective act of will. By actively preserving the poet's image, she assumes a certain propriety over it, one which he implicitly fears. When he declares that because the picture is retained in her heart it must be "from all malice free," he assumes that his lover still possesses a potential for autonomy which he could construe as malice. In a sense, he fears that intersubjective recognition, like its narcissistic forbear, is vulnerable to changes in the woman's desire and subjectivity. Thus the poet's picture, the emblem which he implicitly hopes will assure his continued recognition by her, simultaneously elicits a sense of threat, for perhaps the woman *could* use this picture as an object of
aggression. But because he has accepted his lover's recognition of him, he disavows this possibility. His picture, preserved in her heart, in her loving responsiveness to him, will not be the victim of her malice. In the moment of intersubjective recognition, narcissistic fears lose their power to harm.

By imagining his lover as an autonomous subject attuned to his desire rather than as a mirror, Donne's poet suggests that the desire for recognition does not necessarily involve the domination or negation of the other. The quest for recognition may not invariably lead, as Lacan and much modern theory would suggest, to a dialectic of mastery and self-alienation. Instead, as my reading of *Witchcraft by a picture* implies, Donne's desire for recognition avoids being simply an inflection of narcissism, however construed. His interest in woman is not, as Docherty suggests, an attempt to convert her "into an aspect of the Self," one which is "thus rendered harmless, 'colonized' or appropriated and controlled."39 Though the poet does hope that his lover will reflect his desire, the satisfaction of this wish does not depend on his verbal or narcissistic colonization of her (the woman, in fact, through her tears, "burns" his colonizing form). Instead, it depends on her desire to use her autonomy (and love) to recognize him. It is her desire as much as his which is of interest in the poem.

Recognition, according to Jessica Benjamin, involves a tension between the self's need to assert its own desire and agency and its need to be attuned to another.40 It requires,
paradoxically, a sense of both autonomy and dependency, a desire to actively engage with and, at times, control the other and, conversely, a need for an other who, while being responsive to the self, remains different. She bases this analysis on a critique of classical psychoanalytical accounts of infancy.\textsuperscript{41} Her concern is that "no psychological theory has adequately articulated the mother's independent existence."\textsuperscript{42} Instead, the mother has been normally portrayed as an extension of the child, "an object of the baby's needs." In the psychoanalytic tales of childhood, the mother frequently appears as a site of failed unity and pleasure, as an object which meets but increasingly resists the child's demands. Because the mother cannot fulfill the child's demands perfectly, she becomes the figure who limits the child's dreams of omnipotence, and therefore becomes the representative of "external reality" for the child.\textsuperscript{43} Recent research on infancy, however, as Benjamin notes, does not support these objectifying mother-child configurations. In fact, one researcher, Daniel Stern, argues that infants "never experience a period of total self/other undifferentiation. There is no confusion between self and other in the beginning or at any point during infancy."\textsuperscript{44} In his view, an infant is never enveloped in narcissistic solipsism; from the earliest moments of life, the infant is oriented towards otherness which very rapidly develops into others. The infant is, to use Stern's locution, fundamentally intersubjective.\textsuperscript{45} At no time, then, is the mother simply an element in the infant's narcissistically constituted world. Rather, the mother, in
addition to regulating the satisfaction of the infant's bodily needs, is the subject with whom the infant explores the dynamics of relatedness. She is, for both Stern and Benjamin, the figure through whom the infant choreographs its assertions and desire for contingent responses. She is the subject who enables the infant to negotiate the paradox of autonomy and dependence through experiences of unison and otherness and through pleasurable exchanges of recognition.

The desire to be recognized by an other, then, a desire which pervades Donne's poetry, need not be conceived as an effect either of a will for domination or the narcissistic captivation with a mirror image. It may be, quite simply, an other pleasure, arising from archaic desires for unison (not unity) with an other. This does not mean, however, that the desire for recognition is not entwined with the dynamics of rivalry and aggression. The problem is that since recognition requires the attunement or captivation of an other, it inherently involves a need for the other's desire. Thus, intrinsic to the structure of recognition from its inception is a certain measure of dependency and absence of control. The self needs the other's desire in order to see its own desire reflected, or at least to see the other's contingent responsiveness. Its pleasure is, very literally, in the other's desire. If the other resists engagement, then, this pleasure is deferred or negated. The relation of pleasure will now refashion itself, at least in part, as a relation of power. Recognition, if it is to be attained, comes to require assertions
that have *force* which may be either physical or symbolic. The
desire for attunement, in the face of the other's resistance,
explicitly comes to involve contention. This shift, however, is
neither irreversible nor final. Rivalry does not necessarily
dominate or assimilate the pleasures of recognition (though such
can occur in certain cases). Nor does it turn the desire for
recognition, as Hegel would have it (at least in the first stage of
the master/slave dialectic), into a fight to the death which ends
only with the submission of one party to the other. Rather,
rivalry and the desire for recognition contend with each other
fluxively, appearing to coincide at times but also engendering
vastly differing modes of interest in the other.

Donne's interest in the other manifests this fluxive
contention.⁴⁹ In *Witchcraft by a picture*, the poet's acceptance
of his lover's tears as signs of recognition allows him to
displace the dynamics of narcissism and rivalry which had
troubled him in the poem's opening stanza. Through his
attunement to the *meaning* of his lover's grief, he enables
himself to sacrifice his narcissistic projections and investments
and open himself to a more intersubjective engagement with her.
In this moment of recognition, he can enjoy her love. Frequently,
however, Donne's poets imagine not getting the recognition from
women that they desire, or they fear that such recognition cannot
or will not last. In such cases, they normally exhibit one of two
strategies: either they demean the woman (or women in general),
explicitly soliciting recognition from an anticipated audience
rather than from any relations with the other fictionalized in the poetry; or they attempt to seduce the female other, using poetic wit as a means to fashion engagement into recognition. Though both strategies exhibit a tension between the desire for recognition and threats of rivalry, it is in seduction that recognition and rivalry as differing modes of interest in the other are most dynamically entangled. It is also in seduction that the interplay of desire, intersubjectivity and aggression which haunts almost all of Donne's poetry appears, perhaps, in its most paradigmatic form.

In *Aire and Angels*, a poem which begins as a seduction and ends with an ambivalent and enigmatic evocation of love, rivalry and sexual hierarchy, the desire for recognition and its complications dominate the poet's interest. It is this unexpected focus, I think, which has caused the wide range of critical appraisals and interpretations of the poem. John R. Roberts, in a recent survey of the critical literature, concludes that "no other poem of Donne's canon has been given so many completely contradictory readings."50 Peter De Sa Wiggins makes much the same point, suggesting that "interpretations manage . . . to look as if they could not have arisen from scrutiny of the same object."51 Part of the problem is that critics seem to divide along a rather hoary faultline that has exerted a structuring influence on much of the criticism concerned with Donne's love poetry since before the turn of the century.52 Either the poem is perceived as an example of Donne's rakish wit and misogyny or it
is perceived as an example of his perception of woman as an
enthralling and even transcendent figure of mutual love and
desire.\textsuperscript{53} I would like to argue instead that *Aire and Angels* is a
poem which focuses on acquiring recognition from the other but
remains ambivalent about how to attain it. The poet seems
unable to decide whether his poetic interest (and his seduction)
lies with the woman or with his imagined audience. He also
seems unable to decide whether the recognition he desires comes
through engagement with the other's desire or through rivalry and
domination. It is this ambivalence which leads to the disparity
in critical evaluations of the poem. It is this same ambivalence
that condenses the problematic which pervades almost all of
Donne's poetry: how to negotiate or satisfy the desire for
recognition.

The poem begins with the sort of exaggerated and stylized
gesture which typifies the discourse of seduction:

\begin{verbatim}
Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angels affect us oft, and worship'd bee;
    Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see,
    But since, my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
    More subtile then the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
    And therefore what thou wert, and who
I bid love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.
\end{verbatim}

(1-14)
The woman being flattered was, according to the poet, known, loved, and recognized before he had had any material or verbal contact with her. She, like an angel, was able to elicit his desire and adoration even though he had not yet had the opportunity to perceive her visual form. This devotion to the woman as a sort of "numinous visitation"\textsuperscript{54} recalls and exaggerates Petrarchan idealism, dramatically and rather audaciously literalizing Petrarch's frequent spiritualizations of desire. It also allows the poet to suggest the prodigious nature of his recognition of her—he worships her not for her appearance or presence, but in anticipation of them. By framing his adoration in this way, he seductively intimates that his recognition of the woman is both miraculous and without cost since he could neither expect nor require reciprocation on her part. He had recognized her because of her intrinsic worth, because of her preternatural, angelic appeal, not because of any intersubjective pull or visual captivation she might have exerted if she were present. This idealization of the poet's investment in the other, however, is ironized by the bawdy implications of the poem's very first line. When the poet declares that "Twice or thrice had I loved thee,/ Before I knew thy face or name," his language implies that his anticipatory love had occurred in discreet acts, that he had loved her in others. Thus, though at one level he suggests that his recognition of her preceded and transcended carnality, at another level it transpired through and only through the poet's implicitly
carnal knowledge of other women. The woman's angelic ideality thus becomes an effect of both the poet's preternatural recognition of her and her effaced "presence" in the poet's previous loves. She is, simultaneously, a venerated paradigm and, at least in the past, subject to possible exchange; she is, for the poet, both captivating and anonymous.

The seduction, then, begins on a note of ambivalence. The poet offers his lady an extravagant show of recognition but undermines it at the same time. This same ambivalence reappears when the poet remembers the first time he actually saw her: "Still when, to where thou wert, I came,/ Some lovely glorious nothing I did see . . . ." On the one hand, the poet uses the epithet "lovely glorious nothing" to extend the angelic comparison and emphasize the ethereal nature of her beauty. She is a "nothing" because she is, like an angel, incorporeal. On the other hand, by calling her a "nothing," the poet registers his sense of the inadequacy of such an incorporeal form. His interest, as he begins to reveal, is not simply to recognize her, but to use that recognition to solicit a reciprocating and more carnal form of acknowledgement. For as his soul needs to take "limmes of flesh" in order to act on its desires, so too his love requires incarnation: "Love must not be, but take a body too." Love, then, according to the poet, depends on a tacit act of domination for its very existence. It must take a body. And this means that the woman cannot remain incorporeal, a figure of enthralling wonder. Her ethereal appeal must acquire a face and a
name, attributes that can be subjected to the poet's more carnal longing. This lust, according to Janel Meuller, produces "an excess of verbal and attitudinal aggression in this male's pursuit of his female object of desire."\textsuperscript{55} When the poet bids "Love" to investigate the woman's identity at the end of the stanza, Meuller reads his language as a climax "in verbalizations of invasion and proprietary moves by the male speaker . . . ."\textsuperscript{56}

And therefore what thou wert, and who
I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.

For Meuller, the poet's desire is framed, quite simply, by a need for self-possession. Having lost his self-control at the beginning of the poem because of the woman's entrancing allure, he now tries to restore it through what Meuller calls his "imperious rhetoric."\textsuperscript{57} If he can assume control of his rhetoric and thereby assume control of the woman, then perhaps he can assume control of himself.

Donne's rhetoric and his "Love," however, are not quite as "imperious" as Meuller would suggest. Though both the poet and his love ultimately "assume" the woman's body, an act which resonates with sexual and proprietary implications, this assumption is not simply an act of arrogation or possession. It also involves recognizing the woman's body, her spatial otherness, as a necessary foundation for love. To love the woman as a "numinous visitation" is, as the poet makes clear, to love
nothing. In order for love to be, it must "assume" (presuppose, take on, seize) the woman's body. This shift from a Petrarchan to a more Ovidian presentation of love, however, does not eliminate the ambivalence in the stanza between the dynamics of recognition and domination, nor does it mean that love, for Donne's poet, has become merely an extension of aggressive sexual drives. Though the poet earlier had given his own "love" a patriarchal lineage, asserting that it was the "child" of his soul, the "Love" that reappears in the poem's final lines is not quite so tied up in patrilineal descent. First, since it is capitalized, this "Love" is not the same as the "love" that the poet mentioned earlier. It has been hypostatized and personified, and thereby figuratively separated from the poet. Thus, when the poet wishes to find out more about his other, he must "bid Love ask" her. "Love" has become a subject who must be addressed. His desire to know his angelic lady, then, is not simply imposed on the woman. Instead, the poet explicitly formulates his desire as passing through an intersubjective mediator. And it is only when this mediator implicitly recognizes the woman, when "Love's" questions have been answered and her body is assumed, that the poet as proprietary subject allows "Love" to "fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow." This use of the blazon (the rhetorical itemization and display of woman's beauty), however, is itself ambiguous. Though it suggests the poet's alliance with a conventional male urge to articulate women as objects of desire and to reduce them to an array of body or facial parts which can
be displayed for the appreciation of other men, his phrasing also suggests that he gives himself over to love, that he allows it, only when "Love" is incarnate in the woman's body, when his desire is voluntarily reflected in and by her. The "fixing" of "Love" occurs only through the woman's favorable response to "Love's" queries, only through her assumption of the poet's desire. He is transfixed by features, by a face which, in its blazon of love, subjectively assumes his love and recognizes him. In some sense, it is her recognition as much as his proprietary assertion that allows him to license his desire.

There is, then, at least for Donne's poet, a sense of resolution at the end of the first stanza. His ambivalence about attaining recognition through domination or through an intersubjective attunement of desires with the other seems delicately poised in what is for him a gratifying, latent equilibrium. He can display or blazon his lover for others, acquiring homosocial recognition, yet he simultaneously assumes and depends on the woman's recognition and love to fulfill the blazon. It is her receptivity to "Love" which allows the poet to give himself over to captivation and allow "Love" to "fixe it selfe in [her] lip, eye, and brow." And it is through this same receptivity that the poet acquires a measure of self-possession at the stanza's end. He has become the fixed subject of love's wonder, transfixed in and by a self-assuring gaze of recognition. He grasps his own subjectivity in the other's love.
The poet's freedom to submit himself to love, however, provides no lasting sense of self-possession as the second stanza immediately shows. Love, for the poet, cannot be effectively "ballasted" by reducing a woman to a blazon, to a set of physical "wares." Instead, the attempt to steady love through such physical captivation paradoxically overwhims and scuttles it:

Whilst thus to ballast love, I thought,  
And so more steddily to have gone,  
With wares which would sinke admiration,  
I saw, I had love's pinnace overfraught,  
Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon  
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought . . .  

(15-20)

More may be at issue, however, than the poet's sense of being "overfraught" by the woman's appearance. Achsah Guibbory suggests that the poet's suddenly vexed sense of love stems from an implied event that occurs in the interval between stanzas--sexual intercourse. She infers this from the loaded, implicitly sexual language with which the poet begins stanza two. The poet, having succeeded with his seduction and elicited the love and recognition of the other at the end of the first stanza, apparently proceeds with his desire to "know" her and to be recognized fully as a man. As the poet himself stated in the first stanza: "Love must not be, but take a body too" (10, my emphasis). The male imperative towards sexual possession, whether enacted or merely dreamed, however, can prove
debilitating as Donne's poet finds out. Like a "merchant adventurer," the poet had hoped to manage a controlled voyage of amorous commerce and discovery. He had thought that his love, symbolized by his "pinnace," could be effectively piloted, especially if it were "ballasted" physically. But the very "wares" that he had thought would steady his course cause "loves pinnace" to founder. The poet's efforts to assume control over his "pinnace" thus prove ironically self-defeating. Apparently, the poet's vessel of love can only be overburdened, not captained.

Sexual consummation, then, seems to upset the delicate, intersubjective stasis wrought by the poet's hints of reciprocated love at the end of stanza one. It changes the poet's focus from amorous desire and seduction to erotic performance, a change which he associates with a sense of failed mastery or control. Though the poet had imagined that through the blazon he could reduce his lover to "ballast" or "wares" and thereby more easily control his desire, he finds that such loading only ensured his pinnace's eventual demise. The suggestion of sexual consummation also changes the poet's focus in another related way. In the first stanza, "Love" had to recognize the desire and responsiveness of the other; it was, in some sense, intersubjective. In the first few lines of the second stanza, however, love becomes much more narcissistic and phallic in focus. The poet ceases to concern himself with the other's interest, will, or capacity to mirror and instead, through the fragmenting and objectifying power of the blazon, imagines his
lover as a form of merchandise with which to freight and thereby stabilize his own amorous desire. His objectification of her would serve, he had hoped, as the instrumental means through which he could man and ballast his "pinnace," a term which in contemporary slang signified a woman or a prostitute and which also had phallic suggestiveness.\(^\text{62}\) The woman's reduction to parts imagined as commodities would give the poet a sense of propriety and control which he could then transfer to the more unruly pinnace itself. For as the poet has come to recognize, it is the pinnace which proves unstable and vulnerable and which figuratively renders him impotent.

The source of this impotence is twofold. First, the poet fears his lover's potential for sexual freedom. This fear registers in his allusive reference to her as "loves pinnace," an epithet which associates the woman with prostitution and, by extension, suggests that she possesses a certain measure of unmasterable promiscuity. By freighting her with objectifying "tropes of praise,"\(^\text{63}\) the poet seems to have hoped that he could submit her carnal autonomy to his own proprietary desires while simultaneously diminishing his captivation with her. He wishes to master her, apparently, because she enthralls him but remains, like the pinnace, autonomous. But he quickly finds out, much to his dismay, that his effort to ballast her also may destroy her. As he transforms her beauty into wares, he threatens to sink the very vessel that he desires. The other who conjures his desire cannot sustain such objectification. Consequently, the woman as
pinnace cannot be effectively captained, putting the poet in a troubling dilemma. Either he lets her go unballasted, leaving her to choose her own course, or he overburdens her with his proprietary aims which causes her to founder. In neither case can he submit her carnal or material autonomy to his authority in a way which gratifies his desire. The woman, then, as pinnace, cannot be submitted to the poet's implicitly phallic designs.

The second source of the poet's impotence resides, strangely enough, in the poet himself. For "loves pinnace," in addition to alluding to the woman, also appears to allude to the penis, the conventional sign of male dominance over women. It is, perhaps, the penis itself and the desire and instability that it signifies which the poet had hoped to control by reducing his lover to ballast. If he could have assimilated her within his genital desires, he would have been able to gratify and assume mastery of his own sexual nature. At least this was his fantasy. But even when he has reduced the woman to "wares" in his imagination, suppressing her capacity for otherness, his phallic boat founders. His attempt to submit the woman to his wish for phallic control fails, however, not because of anything the woman is or does but because both his desire and the penis/pinnace itself resist such conscious, self-affirming domination. In this sense the penis is, as the term "pinnace" intimates, like a prostitute, since both subvert any simple notion of masculine control or propriety. The poet may be able to imagine objectifying his lover, but his own phallic desires and performance undermine the efficacy of such
domination. In spite of his wishes to the contrary, the poet cannot conn "loves pinnace" through the billows of his own genital wants or performance. His very attempt to "take" his lover's body results in the voidance of any fantasy he has of phallic control. Phallic narcissism, to use Marotti's term, thus sinks under its own weight, overwhelmed by its own proprietary desires and the failure of the penis to conform to them. As Donne's poet admits when he begins to turn back towards his lover: "Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon/ Is much too much, some fitter must be sought" (19-20).

This momentary return to the rhetoric of seduction and compliment suggests the poet's desire to do two things: first, to abandon the reductive, narcissistic realm of sexual use and commerce he has evoked for a more intersubjective realm; and second, to find a means to attend to his longing for recognition since sexual consummation with its attendant fantasy of phallic domination fails to do so. In the wake of the poet's admission of phallic insufficiency, however, this desire for recognition poses a problem. From whom does recognition come? Does he seek it from the woman who holds the greatest potential to provide the attunement which he desires but who also possesses the capacity to withhold such mirroring? Or does he settle for diminished gratification, looking to his poetic audience for homosocial acknowledgement which often occurs at the expense of heterosexual reciprocity and mirroring? The ambivalent and complex answer is both. In the poem's final lines, the poet
engenders and combines what normally are opposed modes of recognition. That doesn't mean that he synthesizes these alternatives. Rather, as the perplexing ambiguity and the equivocating analogies of the final lines attest, both modes of recognition coexist in a rather dense, antiphonal medley:

    For, nor in nothing, nor in things
    Extreme, and scattring bright, can love inhere;
    Then as an Angell, face, and wings
    Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
    So thy love may be my loves sphare;
    Just such disparitie
    As is twixt Aire and Angels puritie,
    'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.
    (21-28)

The most simple thing that can be said about this passage, perhaps, is that it posits an irreducible "disparitie" between the love of men and women. Though this difference may not be available to direct perception (can anyone separate an angel from the air it "wears" to disclose its presence?), it exists both ontologically and hierarchically. Angels, both as immaterial forms and agents, are more pure than the ethereal substance which they must assume to manifest their being. It is a more complicated matter, however, to assign this disparitie to the difference between men's and women's love. Conventionally, such an evocation of hierarchy would be presumed to favor men. Traditionally associated with form and agency rather than matter, men would seem to be associated with the angels while women would be associated with the less pure substance--air--
that requires an imposition of form to make it more than inert matter. These associations are syntactically reinforced in the poem's final couplet where an implicitly parallel construction aligns women's love with air and men's love with angels. Thus, it would appear that the poet uses his comparison of air and angels to affirm the superiority of men as subjects of desire. They are more "pure" than the female substance through which their love is realized. And since the final three lines which define this "disparitie" are expositional rather than explicitly addressed to the poet's lover, it would seem that the poet makes this assertion in order to solicit recognition from his audience. Critics who puzzle over whether the woman would be insulted by the poet's assertion of hierarchy miss the point. The purpose of the poet's analogy is, at one level at least, to affirm that the hierarchical difference between men and women is also ontological, and applies to the field of love. This message is clearly homosocial, using the "disparitie" between men and women to appeal to a predominantly male audience whom he trusts will share and recognize his witty conceit and, by extension, recognize the poet himself.

This reading of the passage, however, meets with internal resistance. When the poet first uses the air and angels analogy in lines 23-25, the angel syntactically seems to be aligned with "thy love" (ostensibly the woman's) and the air with "my love." Though the logic of the analogy requires a reversal of this predication (as air is the medium in which the angel asserts its
proprietary form, so "thy love" is the "spheare" in which "my love" resides and manifests its agency), the order in which its elements are presented suggests a certain ambivalence on the part of the poet. The poem's first stanza prepares the way for this ambivalence since it clearly associates the woman with angels. Semantic ambiguity in line 25, the final line in which the poet directly addresses the woman, also adds to this suggestion of ambivalence about whose love is angelic. As De Sa Wiggins has argued, it is possible to read "thy love" as referring to the poet himself; he is, literally, if his seduction in the first stanza has succeeded, the object of the woman's desire--her "love." Similarly, "my love" can refer to the woman herself rather than the poet's own amorous sensibility. Thus, when the poet asserts that "thy love may be my loves sphare," he may be telling his lover either of two things: that he, like air, can serve as the body in which her love takes form; or conversely, that she, like air, can serve as the body in which his love takes form. In the first case, her love assumes the angel-position in the analogy, and thus would become more pure than his. In the second case, the reverse is true.

This ambivalence lies at the heart of the poet's desire for recognition. On the one hand, he intimates his wish that his love be informed by the woman's. In the aftermath of his phallic foundering, he desires the pleasure which comes from being animated and infused by the other's desire. He wants to be the medium in which she realizes her love. Implicitly, this desire
depends on her subjectivity for its fulfillment. To be recognized, he must be informed by her love. On the other hand, the poet expresses a more narcissistic masculine desire: that the woman serve as the passive, inert "spheare" or receptacle in which he actuates his desire. He, like an angel, would be the intelligence which directs and controls her love. For the poet, however, this splitting of desire does not issue in overt conflict or a dilemma. Instead, the splitting itself registers only through equivocation. Both the poet's desire for self-assertion and his intersubjective interest in the other blur into semantic ambiguity; she can occupy him and his love and, alternatively, he can occupy hers. Neither desire excludes the other. Carefully and ambivalently, then, the poet opens himself to a relation of intersubjective dependency, one in which preeminence hasn't disappeared, but rather oscillates semantically (if not equally) between partners. In the ambiguity of love, recognition can come, apparently, from dual, even contradictory, sources.

Donne's desire for homosocial recognition, then, does not negate his intersubjective interest in the female other. Even though he appears to return to the language of masculine hierarchy at the end of *Aire and Angels*, his previous psychological and semantic ambivalence has undermined the ability of homosocial wit and cynicism to frame his more intersubjective, more responsive involvements with the female other. The "disparitie" between men and women thus becomes an ambivalent, fluxive touchstone for engagement, attunement and
contention rather than an effective arbiter of gender position. Recognition, for Donne, is not simply a product of an imaginary dominance of woman (whether motivated historically, homosocially and/or narcissistically). As I will show in what follows, Donne's pervasive dream in his amorous poetry is for the wonder of intersubjective, symmetrical love, a love which survives phallic foundering and the threatening autonomy of the other's desire. His problem in fulfilling this dream, however, a problem which surfaces repeatedly in his amorous poetry, is that it is subject to and actuated in woman's desire. His dream cannot be fulfilled narcissistically or by an imposition of masculine (phallic) power. Rather, he finds that woman's desire must be courted, seduced, reflected or, when recalcitrant, denounced, which involves Donne in both audacious verbal salvos and a desiring recognition of women's capacity for autonomy. The female other, for Donne, is much more than a vessel for narcissistically motivated self-affirmation. She also holds, in a way that a coterie audience never can, the wonder of intersubjective recognition. It is this capacity, in all of its complication and ambivalence, which motivates Donne's imaginary attachments to woman and which structures his variegated poetics of love.


3. Bald states that the marriage involved "a specific offense against canon law," though he does not specify precisely what the violation was (130-131).

4. Lawrence Stone suggests that although marital patterns were gradually changing in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the upper classes remained wedded to arranged marriages as the prevailing means of controlling heterosexual matches (The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, abridged edition, New York, Harper, 1979, p. 127-134). Part of the reason for this phenomenon is that marriages in these classes often involved substantial financial and political stakes, and these concerns often took precedence over love as a reason for marrying since love was thought to be too ephemeral to warrant permanent coupling. In addition, children in these classes normally required parental largesse to establish themselves financially, and therefore had ample motive to obey parental decisions concerning marriage. Though the increasing Protestant emphasis on the sacred bond of marriage rather than on familial and economic context stressed a more affective basis for marital decisions, such notions, according to Stone, had not yet affected the upper classes in any major way. Keith Wrightson, following Stone, asserts that amongst the aristocracy and gentry "parental power over the choice of marriage partners remained absolute, but a right of veto was conceded to the young parties to a match" (English Society 1580-1680, New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press, 1982, p. 70-71). This power of veto allowed some room for affection and choice to enter marital decisions, though
it still meant that any potential partner remained obliged to receive parental approval. Alan Macfarlane suggests that, in general, marital choices were freer in early modern England than Stone suggests, but admits that the daughters of the upper gentry and aristocracy—women such as Anne More—were strongly constrained in their marital decisions by parental preferences (Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Production 1300-1840, London: Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 140).

5Carey, p. 87.

6Carey, in his introduction to his edition of Donne, suggests that the marriage "may have been partly motivated by ambition" (xxiii). If so, it was a wild miscalculation by Donne as later events proved. Of course, it is possible that part of Donne's attraction to Anne may have been an effect of her station. As his letter indicates, Donne had hopes that George More's interest in his daughter's welfare would prevent him from ruining Donne's career and perhaps even induce him to give the couple some of the benefits of his wealth. As Donne argues "it is irremediably done: that if you incense my Lord [Thomas Egerton, Donne's employer], you destroy her and me: that it is easy to give us happiness, and that my endeavors and industry, if it please you to prosper them, may soon make me somewhat worthier of her . . . " (87). Donne uses Anne here in two ways: as a means to shield himself from her father's anger and to solicit him as a patron. However much he may have loved her, he is not above trying to deploy her as a negotiating chip in what he hopes will become a social transaction between himself and More. He is, however, also concerned that Anne not "feel the terror of [her father's] sudden anger" (87).
Macfarlane writes that in England “from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries marriage for men from 14, for girls from 12, was valid against all pressures from the outside world” (Marriage and Love, p. 127). The Church itself, he writes, “was ultimately on the side of the couple. Betrothal even without parents’ consent was absolutely binding” (145). Though parents, friends, employers and others could strenuously object to a marriage and wreak economic and social consequences on a disapproved couple, they had no legal authority to invalidate a marriage once it had occurred.

Bald, 135-36.

A contemporary of Donne, John Manningham, recorded in his diary that Egerton had dismissed Donne because the marriage had violated both social decorum and Egerton’s will: “[Donne] was lately secretary to the Lord Keeper, and cast off because he would match him selfe to a gentlewoman against his Lord’s pleasure” (cited by Bald, p. 139, spelling slightly emended).

His eventual sinecure in the church was essentially a move away from court service, not into it.

The chief problem with Donne’s relation with Anne was not that it was transgressive or illicit. The court could easily bear such behavior. What could not be tolerated was the marriage itself, which ratified the alliance and permanently usurped George More’s legal authority over his daughter. It is this usurpation of authority which rendered Donne suspect more than the illicit alliance itself.


14 Bald, 132.

15 Arthur Marotti suggests that due to "the overproduction of trained gentlemen" (29), opportunities for civil employment were scarce (John Donne, Coterie Poet, Madison: U. Wisconsin Press, 1986). In such an environment, transgressive behavior was particularly ill-advised. This did not, of course, prevent licentious or illicit dalliances and affairs, but it did normally preclude the parties from using marriage to ratify such an alliance.

16 Love and ambition, however, are not necessarily opposed. Donne may have fantasized that his father-in-law would eventually forgive his transgression and advance his career. In this case, love would serve ambition, and ambition would support love. But the insubordination of the marriage, its violation of rules of propriety, implies that love was more important than ambition in motivating it.

17 Jacques Derrida argues, throughout his work, that dissimulation pervades language as such; it is, in fact, the "proper" condition of language (see, for example, Of Grammatology, trans., Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1976). In a more conventional sense, Donne's strong use of dramatic personae significantly complicates any relation between author and text. Judith Scherer Herz has argued that "for Donne, the artist remains the conjurer who disappears into his own illusions" ("An Excellent Exercise of Wit that Speaks so Well of Ill: Donne and the Poetics of Concealment," in The Eagle and the Dove, ed., Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, Columbus: U. Missouri Press, 1986, p. 3-14, see p. 5.), and that the poetic subject as manifested in the poetry represents the "nature of illusionism itself" (3). Herz is arguing against the
tradition in Donne criticism that associates Donne's poetic strengths with individuality, subjectivity, and emotional realism.

Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*.

Marotti argues that "Donne's dream of communication was one in which the reader or audience or congregation repeated, or mirrored in their response, the thoughts and feelings of the author who made the text. In the letters, as in the poetry, personal psychological struggles were used as a medium of communication with a sympathetic reader" (22). This version of Donne's rhetorical intent, however, seems to more accurately describe the letters and verse epistles than the lyrical poetry. When Donne writes to Henry Wotton that "Letters [have] for their principal office, to be seals and testimonies of mutuall affection, but the materials and fuell of them should be a confidant and mutuall communicating of those things which we know" (*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 104, also cited by Marotti), he imagines his writing to be the external witness, the surety, of a deep similarity and recognition that exists between himself and Wotton and which precedes its verbal formalization. This dream of male solidarity, however, is disrupted in the poetry. The source of that disruption, as I will demonstrate, is woman. In spite of Marotti's arguments to the contrary, Donne's interest in woman is not simply a displacement of Donne's desire for recognition by men, but a manifestation of a concern with the other that goes beyond gender while playing itself out in specific, gendered forms.


The opposition between heterosexual and homosocial desires is complicated by the fact that the homosocial realm itself is internally differentiated. Thus Donne's
marriage to Anne, while offending More and, eventually, Egerton, his elders and social superiors, may have established a bond of secrecy between Donne and the friends of his own generation who assisted with the marriage. The very impudence of his marriage could thus have augmented certain homosocial alliances, at least temporarily (two of Donne's cohorts, Christopher Brooke and his brother, were eventually jailed for their participation in the nuptials, see Bald, 135-136).

Donne's interest in woman does not appear in an unmediated or "natural" form in his life either. Desire is always subject to cultural generation, influence, specification and to semiotic drift.

Ilona Bell argues that there is a strong and fairly straightforward connection between the marriage, the romance which she believes produced it, and the *Songs and Sonnets* in which she sees Donne to be placing "his love above financial and professional considerations" ("Under Ye Rage," p. 25). Bell attempts to strengthen this link by referring to three letters in the Burley manuscript which she attributes to Donne, and which she reads as "love letters." The problem with her argument, however, is that her analysis of the letters is produced by her reading of the poetry. The relation between the biographical material and the poetry is reflective because it is circular: a particular reading of the poetry determines her interpretation of Donne's life; and a particular reading of the biographical materials determines or reinforces her reading of the poetry. There is no room for discontinuity. This is the fatal problem in much biographical criticism—the hermeneutic circle becomes vicious.

Henceforward, I will use the term "poet" to refer to the speaker-effect or author-position generated by each poem. By using this term, I wish to mark the separation between the "poet" and the "author." The "poet" is a verbal effect
produced by the poem itself; the "author" is, of course, Donne, though his appearance in the poems takes place only through the mediation of the "poet." I wish to resist conflation between the two.


26The statement's cynical context in the poem does not obliterate its import. There is a powerful sense in Donne's poetry that love is wonder, even in the more cynical poems.


28Docherty, 43-44.

29Docherty eventually moves beyond narcissism by indicating that the underlying problem for Donne is not "woman" but history, mutability, and errancy which Donne's poet-surrogate finally wakes to in the poem's final three lines. What Docherty misses in his analysis, however, is Donne's investment in woman, an investment which goes beyond viewing woman only as a means of constructing and confirming male identity. For Donne, the dynamics of recognition cannot be reduced to a form of narcissism, at least as conventionally understood.

30Docherty uses this language of appropriation and colonization in his chapter "The problem of women." See p. 52.

31Marotti, p. 72.

32It is not surprising, however, that Docherty would interpret the dynamics of recognition according to a logic of narcissistically motivated domination. As Vincent Descombes has argued, much postmodern thought has been influenced either directly or indirectly by Alexander Kojeve's reading of Hegel (Modern French Philosophy, trans., L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding, Cambridge, Cambridge U.
Press, 1980, p. 9-16). Those who attended Kojève's lectures included, at various times, Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Raymond Queneau, Pierre Klossowski, Alexandre Koyre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, André Breton, Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas (the list is a shortened version of one provided by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan: the Absolute Master, trans., Douglas Brick, Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1991, p. 243-244). According to Kojève, history, the domain of human interaction, results from a violent struggle for recognition. The very identity of man as man depends on his participation in this struggle: "the being that cannot risk its life in a Fight for Recognition, in a fight for pure prestige --is not a truly human being" (Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, ed., Allan Bloom, trans., James H. Nichols, Jr., Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1980, p. 41, see p. 40-60. Descombes calls Kojève's version of Hegel a "terrorist version of history," p. 14. See also David Macey, Lacan in Contexts, London, Verso, 1988, p. 96-98). This emphasis on conflict and the desire for prestige as the foundation for human conduct echoes intertextually in works such as Docherty's which see the desire for recognition as involving a fight for identity which attains partial satisfaction in the negation of the other. Of course, Docherty could also be influenced by Hegel himself and Marxist readings of him. Hegel himself has written, for example, that "Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby unalloyed feeling of self. This satisfaction, however, just for that reason is itself only a state of evanescence, for it lacks objectivity or subsistence" (The Phenomenology of Mind, trans., J. B. Baillie, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 238). This is precisely Docherty's argument.


36Lacan states that "what demonstrates the phenomenon of recognition, which involves subjectivity, are the signs of triumphant jubilation and playful discovery that characterize, from the sixth month, the child's encounter with his image in a mirror" (*Ecrite*, p. 18).

37Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen sees violence and aggressivity as inherent in the Freudian ego as well, particularly in its narcissistic component: "For narcissism is precisely that: the violent affirmation of the ego, the violent desire to annul the primitive alteration that makes me desire (myself) as the mimetic double" (*The Freudian Subject*, trans., Catherine Porter, Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1988, p. 93).

38For Lacan, this problem of rivalry is both sublimated and exacerbated by the child's venture into language. Through this venture, the child assumes the place of the "I" in discourse, constituting itself as a subject but simultaneously submitting itself to the dictates and desires of an impersonal "Other," that is, language itself. The ego, constructed through formal identifications, is not the same as this "I." In fact, according to Lacan, it is repressed by this "I." Thus the child becomes a subject by decreasing its rivalry with the other (it implants itself in the other's language). It does so, however, by making that rivalry *internal*. The ego, born of an illusory mastery, will not accept the castration of desire involved in assuming one's subjective place in the verbal order. Therefore the ego in its narcissistic quest for authority takes the subject as its rival and vice versa. This rivalry, according to Lacan, is one of the structural knots that defines the psyche. For a much more detailed analysis of this problematic, see Richard Boothby, *Death and*
Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1991, p. 21-45. Boothby emphasizes that aggressivity is directed against the ideal unity of the self constituted in mirroring identifications: "Aggressivity is a drive toward violation of the imaginary form of the body that models the ego. It is because aggressivity represents a will to rebellion against the imago that aggressivity is specifically linked to violations of bodily integrity" (p. 39). I would argue, however, that aggressivity is more bipolar than Boothby suggests here, and involves a drive to overcome splitting by annihilating binary relations as such. This is the pole dominated by the Lacanian version of narcissism.

39 Docherty, p. 52.

40 Benjamin, The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination, New York: Pantheon, 1988, p. 11-50. Her belief that there exists a sense of mutuality in interpersonal dynamics from the very beginnings of infancy, however, imposes an overly humanistic interpretation on the dynamics of the parent-infant dyad. An infant's orchestrated interactions with an other, while intersubjective more than narcissistic, do not involve the ethical or metaphysical implications which a term like "mutuality" attempts to institute.

41 Her primary targets are drive theory and ego psychology.

42 Benjamin, p. 23. It is interesting to note that for Lacan, who Benjamin does not address in this context, the (m)other, at least initially, can be figuratively reduced to a mirror, an inanimate object.

43 Benjamin, p. 23.


45 Stern, p. 10.
Stern asserts that at three to five months, the gazing patterns of mothers and infants occur between "two people with almost equal facility and control over the same social behavior" (p. 21). The "premature" of the infant's gaze, then, allows it to negotiate engagement with the other from extremely early in life. The infant's interest in the other consequently cannot be reduced to what has conventionally been construed as instinctual needs (food, water, tactile comfort, etc.). Relatedness itself seems to have crucial importance. Stern also notes that during breast feeding, an infant normally gazes at its mother's eyes (The First Relationship: Mother and Infant, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1977, p. 36). This captivation with the mother's eyes is facilitated biologically. A newborn's eyes focus clearly only on objects roughly eight inches away from its own. That is approximately the distance between the eyes of a nursing baby and those of its mother.

According to Lawrence Stone, children raised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not receive much of what I would call recognition. Stone states that there was a "fierce determination to break the will of the child, and to enforce his utter subjection to the authority of his elders and supervisors, and most noticeably of his parents" ("Corporal Punishment," in Loving, Parenting and Dying: the Family Cycle in England and America, Past and Present, ed., Vivian C. Fox and Martin H. Quint, New York, Psychohistory Press, 1980, p. 289). "Parents," he asserts, "were advised that the only way for them to enforce their authority was to avoid any hint of friendliness towards the child" (293). This breaking of the will of children began very early according to Stone. Infants almost from birth were subject to techniques of swaddling which essentially bound them from hand to foot, causing sensory, motor and affective deprivation (Stone, Family, Sex, and Marriage,
p. 100). Joseph E. Illich adds that children during the period were routinely beaten and only occasionally soothed ("English Childrearing in the Seventeenth Century," in *Loving, Parenting, and Dying*, ed., Fox and Quint, p. 278). In general, according to Illich, parents deployed "aggressive responses to infant vulnerability" (283). Stone argues that such childrearing practices produced a syndrome of deprivation, one which manifested itself in the brutality of Elizabethan and Jacobean society (*Family, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 99). I would only like to add that such deprivation would exacerbate the tension between the child's desire for recognition and its fury over its dependency. It would make the pleasures of recognition a scarce commodity, inflated in value, difficult but wondrous to attain, and potentially treacherous, precisely how such pleasures and their putative source, women, appear in Donne's poetry.

48 As Benjamin argues, Hegel's dialectic of master and slave hovers around any account of intersubjective rivalry though it may not accurately explain the dynamics of that rivalry (p. 31-36). Benjamin suggests that Hegel's view "of the conflict between independence and dependence meshes with the psychoanalytic view" (31). I would agree, but emphasize that Hegel's account misconstrues recognition in both the master and the slave as a capitulation to given power relations. Recognition is not necessarily subject to hierarchical social organization.

49 See the verse epistles and his *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* for instances in which this other is male.


Deborah Aldrich Larson summarizes this splitting in Donne criticism in *John Donne and Twentieth-Century Criticism*, Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson U. Press, 1987, p. 136 ff. She defines this split as occurring between those who view Donne as an egotist and those who see him as an ideal lover. Many critics, however, see this division as occurring within Donne's poetic oeuvre itself, with some poems manifesting the poet's "witty" misogyny and others his more mature veneration for mutual love (see, for example, A. J. Smith, *John Donne: The Songs and Sonnets*, London: Edward Arnold, 1972, p. 48-60). The problem with *Aire and Angels* is that critics cannot reach a workable consensus defining on which side of the faultline the poem lies. Its relative position seems entirely determined by each critic's global judgments about Donne's attitude towards women and love in general.


Meuller, "Play," p. 86.

Meuller, "Play," p. 87.


58 Patricia Parker argues that the use of the blazon as a figure involves "the taking control of a woman's body rhetorically through its division into parts" (Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property, New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 126). She relates this to the a "merchandizing context" in which men detail "women's parts as an inventory of goods" (128, 131). She also relates this to a male projection of desire in which the male constructing the blazon sees his desire as emanating from his object (141). I would only add that such appropriative desires does not preclude male desire from being intersubjective.

59 Gulbbery, p. 106.

60 Gulbbery states that "The language here suggests a male, post-coital feeling of exhaustion, the speaker's sense that the female body is overwhelming, and his feeling of his own insufficiency" (107).

61 The phrase is Meuller's, "Play," p. 89.

62 Michael Shoenfeldt notes that "pinnace" can signify either a prostitute or the phallus ("Patriarchal Assumptions and Egalitarian Designs," John Donne Journal, 9 (1990) 23-26, p. 23). Shoenfeldt sees in this a suggestion a "lability of gender characteristics" (23). I would point out, however, that the prostitute-phallus equivalence points more to a conflicted mixture of sexual desire and aversion than to gender instability. As used in the poem, the phallic implications of "pinnace" seem more overt and resonant then the slang use of the term to indicate a prostitute. Many critics have pointed out the phallic implications of the term "pinnace," noting the rough homonymy between "pinnace" and "penis" to support their reading [see, for example, Albert C. Labriola, "This Dialogue of One:" Rational Argument and Affirmative Discourse in Donne's 'Aire and Angels,'" John Donne
Journal, 9 (1990) 77-83, p. 80. See also, Ronald Corthell, who views the penis/pinnace equivalence as the subject of the poem in his essay "Donne's 'Disparitie:' Inversion, Gender, and the Subject of Love in Some Songs and Sonnets, Exemplaria, 1 (1989) 17-42, p. 33].

Corthell, 31.

Wiggins, 90-96. I don't agree, however, with his assumption that the poem must adhere to formalistic notions of consistency, or that the poet presumes mutual love.
Contentious Intimations and
the Intersubjective Structures of Seduction

The desire for recognition is nothing if not ambitious, for it involves the most grandiose of impulses: the wish to redefine or transform the very structure and orientation of the world. Unable to tolerate either repudiation or indifference, the desire for recognition longs to establish a centripetal, almost solar pull within whatever interpersonal universe it inhabits; it dreams, in a sense, a Copernican dream, hoping to install itself as the gravitational center of an animate, responsive cosmos. The desire for recognition, then, involves a dream of power, a yearning to exert an orienting force over the sphere of the other's movement, agency and desire. In Donne's amorous verse, the relationship between recognition and power displays itself most forcefully in his poetry of seduction. For it is in the waggish banter of seduction that power emerges explicitly as a primary motive in the gamesmanship of love; and, more importantly, it is also in seduction that Donne most self-consciously discloses and accepts the gap between masculine power and authority, a gap which is crucial in attempting to understand both the structure of seduction itself and Donne's use of seduction in his poetry.
Constance Jordan, in her extensive analysis of Renaissance feminism, notes that it is "useful to see power and authority as separate entities."¹ She follows Leonard Krieger in stressing the importance of this division. Krieger asserts that "authority is simply constituted power—that is, any capacity to secure obedience or conformity that carries with it some title to do so."² In other words, authority is power which can coerce or force obedience and subordination. In early modern England, such authority is predicated on a set of tropes which cluster around the notion of monarchy (in its political, religious and even aesthetic dimensions). The authoritarian Elizabethan and Jacobean state served for many writers as the model for domestic and other social relations.³ The familial order was imagined, particularly during the Jacobean period, as an analogue of the political order. This instituted resemblance between the family and the monarchy was reflected in contemporary property law which vested husbands with immense legal control over their wives, effectively codifying male authority. Marriage thus served, in effect, as a warren in which men were granted and held title to power. But as Jordan notes, such authority did not eliminate women's power, it just prevented them from having the "political status . . . to exercise it."⁴ Within certain social settings, women may have had considerable power to enact their own will and to resist that of men; "what they lack," according to Jordan and feminists of the period, "is the authority--the title, the office--to give that power a public and institutional character."⁵ Power, then, according to
Jordan, was much more mobile than was authority, since power could reside in either men or women and authority was conferred predominantly onto men.\(^6\)

The distinction between power and authority is pivotal in understanding Donne's poetry of seduction and the role which his desire for recognition plays within it. Simone de Beauvoir, in her now classic feminist manifesto *The Second Sex*, asserts the importance, indeed, the centrality, that Woman as an other assumes in the construction of masculine subjectivity:

woman is the Other in whom the subject transcends himself without being limited, who opposes him without denying him; she is the Other and therein she is so necessary to man's happiness and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have invented her.\(^7\)

For de Beauvoir, writing in the distant wake of Hegel, men need women because they need an other to dominate. At issue is what de Beauvoir would see as a suprahistorical male desire for recognition: men continually use women as the primary means through which to establish and authorize their own collective and individual identities. As in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the male subject constitutes its own selfhood (self-consciousness) by forcing an other (a woman) to conform to some degree to his own narcississtic desires.\(^8\) Women are, according to this analysis, the means through which men constitute and then recognize a coherence between their own power and authority. The very existence of women allows men to imagine and, at times, to enact
a narcissistic confluence of masculine status, prerogative and potency, a confluence which would serve to obliterate the historically constituted differences between male power and authority. Women thus function, according to de Beauvoir, as figures of male fantasy and desire, as others to be subjugated in the male project of self-fashioning.

Several recent critics read Donne's love poetry, and in particular his poetry of seduction, as a fantasized effort to unite male verbal power with authority in just the way that de Beauvoir's analysis would suggest. Two of these critics, Thomas Docherty and Stanley Fish, are paradigmatic. Docherty forcefully argues that the primary import of Donne's love poetry is to enable the masculine self to acquire power, recognition and identity by verbally mastering the women it invents and articulates: "Fixity of meaning and 'successful' communication become translated in the poetry into the terms of fixing or stabilizing the woman, imagined as the locus of promiscuity and uncertainty. It is as if the Other was no more or less than an empty space, a container of sorts, into which Donne pours his 'influence,' his words which are supposed to shape the Other in an imagined repetition of his own image." Poetic authority thus substitutes for political authority in making the other subject to the power of the self. For Docherty, Donne's subjectivity, his ability to control language and consciousness, fashions itself through its ability to poetically (and politically) subdue women: "The Other, as threat, is domesticated and converted into an aspect of the Self and thus
rendered harmless, 'colonized' or appropriated and controlled.\textsuperscript{10}
Through this conversion, power and authority would unite.
Docherty, however, does note that Donne is quite concerned that both language and woman may not be as open to such mastery as he might wish: "Just as woman is, in the poetry and its ideology, archetypally 'adulterous,' there is the fear, it would seem, that communication as such is potentially adulterous; and what is adulterated most is Donne's own imagination or intentional consciousness . . . .\textsuperscript{11} Woman, in this view, never quite allows Donne the self-possession or recognition he desires for she, like language, continually eludes his desiring grasp. Both are adulterous; both fail to conform to the self's efforts to fashion and institute its own authority.

For Docherty, this subversive autonomy of the Other (the woman \textit{and} language) spoils Donne's poetic dream of omnipotence. In spite of the dramatic force of his verse, his discourse actually displays no authority and precious little power in relation to its others. Its narcissistic bravado, when all is said and done, is impotent, at least instrumentally. Stanley Fish amplifies this sort of judgment in a scathing attack on Donne. According to Fish, Donne, "like God, stands erect before the blank page of female passivity and covers that page with whatever meanings he chooses to inscribe. This is how the speaker of the elegies \textit{always} imagines himself, as a center of stability and control in a world where everyone else is plastic and malleable.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, for Fish, Donne's poetic stance strives to assume and enact phallic (or perhaps solar)
omnipotence, particularly in relation to women. This fantasy of masculine potency, however, is ultimately self-consuming. As in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the other, since she is necessary to the constitution of the master's power, acquires a force and necessity which unseats the autonomy of the master: "But this self-dramatization of an independent authority can be sustained only if the speaker is himself untouched by the force he exerts on others. Were that force to turn back and reclaim him for its own by revealing itself to be the source of his identity (which would no longer be his) he would be indistinguishable from those he manipulates and scorns; he would be like a woman and become the object rather than the origin of his own performance, worked on, ploughed, appropriated, violated."¹³ Like Docherty, Fish views Donne as seeking self-affirmation through a verbal effort to appropriate the female other who, paradoxically, has powers which subvert such appropriation.

But such analyses, while important in suggesting the significance of gender dialectics in the poetry, come short in their endeavor to tease out the complicated and often diverse structure of these dialectics. One reason for this is that both critics assume that there is one dominant relation between man and woman in Donne's poetry, that the form this relation takes manifests a patriarchal urge to subdue woman as the Other, and that this urge requires that the man coerce the woman into fulfilling his language and desires, that he usurp her freedom.¹⁴ A second reason is that both Docherty and Fish misconstrue Donne's desire for
recognition as a narcissistic will to power. Both assume that Donne's audacious, aggressive wit betrays an absolute desire for authority. Such, however, is simply not the case. Though Donne recurrently imagines contending with women for power and love, he almost invariably stages his poet-surrogates as unbuttressed by authority; though they talk a good show, they possess no effective means to coerce obedience or mirroring from the women they admire or address. The women whom Donne creates as his others routinely possess the power to accept or reject his poet-surrogates and their frequently aggressive, seductive rhetoric. This is not accidental. For it is the precise situation in which the power between the male subject and the other is in maximal play.\textsuperscript{15} It is also a situation in which the woman's potential acceptance of the poet's overtures--her recognition of him--carries optimal weight. If she were coerced by his authority, if she had no capacity for autonomy, her recognition would deliver little reward. As Hegel himself realized, the authority of the master renders insubstantial and evanescent the forced recognition of the other.\textsuperscript{16} By choosing to imagine and engage female others who possess and retain some measure of power and autonomy, Donne responds to his desire for recognition even as he both uses and paradoxically forgoes the coercive force of male authority.

This does not mean that Donne's amorous verse avoids participating in what Pierre Bourdieu has called "symbolic violence."\textsuperscript{17} Bourdieu uses this phrase to designate "the violence
which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity," a violence which exists, in a sense, simply in the "order of things."18 When, for example, Donne has his seducer refer to the "passive valor" of his desired lady in the final lines of *The Dampe*, he uses a habitual way of thinking about gender to both grant the female other a form of value and to put that value in a context of implicit male superiority. Such linking of women with passivity is a form of masculine aggression whose conventionality obscures its character as an imposition, that is, as an act of verbal aggression whether or not the woman herself sees it as such. Yet in the context of seduction, such an overture, however violent at a symbolic level, may not have any authority, and real power. Whatever rhetorical force it possesses may be challenged or nullified by the woman's own assertions of power and resistance. She, through silence and non-compliance (through her nonverbal yet forcefully asserted "no"), can assert her own power and agency within the order of things.

In *The Dampe* as in several other poems Donne carefully defers ventriloquizing the female other's response to his seducer's banter, reserving for her a threshold of power which he will not broach. For critics such as Docherty and Fish, however, Donne's frequent use of symbolic violence, even when it self-consciously lacks authority, means that he remains culpable for his participation in what Bourdieu has called a "'phallonarcississtic' economy."19 Part of the reason for this condemnation is their implicit belief that the most advantageous structure for male-female relations of
desire is some version of benign reciprocity, and that relations that deviate from this paradigm are suspect because they tend to be exploitive and disregard the autonomy and agency of woman. Given the imbalances of economic, legal and political power between men and women in early modern England (particularly after marriage), in other words, given patriarchy, non-reciprocal relations of desire (and reciprocal relations as well) were often exploitive on just these grounds. However, the recognition of imbalances in power and agency attached to differences of gender does not preclude the possibility that there are modes of masculine (or feminine) assertion and even aggression which do not replicate any simple patriarchal dialectic of self and other. There may be, perhaps, modes of male-female relating that require women's freedom, that require her potential for promiscuity, that require her autonomy, that require her, in sum, to show agency, desire and power.20 One such mode is seduction.

Jean Baudrillard has stated that "seduction lies in the transformation of things into pure appearances."21 Baudrillard argues that seduction is not simply a means of soliciting or captivating a desired lover; it also establishes a mode of interpersonal commerce which supposes that neither self nor other are fixed or inherently stable substances, but rather are semiological productions which issue from and respond to manifold forms of tropological, desiring play. In seduction, the very discourse of truth and reference subtly loses its force, for seduction depends on the replacement of the dream of reference
and substance with the mobile, illusory presence of appearances. Seduction imagines a realm in which words and signs, rather than seeking to categorize and comprehend the real according to a logic of difference, mix, circulate and exchange according to diverse, subliminal forces of attraction, affirmation and provocation.22 "Nothing," according to Baudrillard, "exists naturally, things exist because challenged, and because summoned to respond to that challenge" (his emphasis).23 Things exist, in a sense, in order to be recognized. But seduction, for Baudrillard, is not simply a "free play" of signs; rather, it is the scene of a nuanced contention, often ritualized, in which signs and appearances challenge and mobilize other signs and appearances, contesting their power to attract, provoke, define or subdue. It is, to be brief, a challenge to simulate, and a challenge to accede to simulation.24 Power remains inherent in seduction, but only as one element in a complicated game of appearances and recognition. It changes to entrenched force, to authority and mastery, only when the scene of seduction ends.

Seduction, however, is not simply a general semiology which functions differently than semiologies founded on notions of truth, reference or representation. It is also an opening within and a challenge to such semiologies. More specifically, it is a mode of interaction between men and women that manifests subtle subversions of more "conventional" gender relations: first, though seduction at times simulates the patriarchal dialectic of sex in which men master woman/nature and assimilate her within the
jurisdiction of verbal and institutional forms of male domination, it simultaneously eludes that dialectic; for within the realm of seduction, woman has power and agency, and must have power and agency. Seduction is both a game and a contest, and as such lasts only so long as woman has the force of her appearances, and can use that appearance of power to initiate, provoke, solicit or resist a desired *exchange* of signs or recognition with a man. The man, in turn, may challenge her appearances, even her resistance, but he cannot force her to accept him. He attracts her, if he can, through a mobilization of appearances, not through an explicit or implicit onslaught of force. The moment he assumes patriarchal authority, using it as a ground rather than as an appearance in the dynamic of seduction or, more paradoxically, the moment he succeeds in his seduction, seduction no longer exists. Seduction disappears because coercive manifestations of power, or even woman's acceptance of a man (in marriage, for instance), frequently involved in early modern England a closure of the contested interchange of signs that animated, that created, the realm of seduction. What had been a sort of game becomes a reification of conventional distributions of power, and the force of appearances cedes to the force of codes, to the conventional order of things.

Seduction also resonates subversively because it involves an implicit provocation of some of the very codes of patriarchy. For the man, in particular, seduction has two "targets:" the woman with whom the seducer wishes to contend and solicit recognition, and the "father" or, more abstractly, the codes governing the
exchange of women, whose influence seduction undermines. One may think here of Othello, whose stories and exploits generate a realm of appearances which leads Desdemona to violate the "law" and power of both her father and Venetian society in order to extend her exchange of signs with Othello.27 And though Othello may not intend to undermine the authority of Brabantio, his words and Desdemona's assertion of agency do just that. Even though Othello supports the "male order of things,"28 seduction works its own subversive magic until it is closed off by Othello's marriage to Desdemona which turns a contestation of conventional distributions of desire and power into Othello's murderous drive for authority and delusional jealousy.

Donne often imagines in seduction a similar, subversive magic which perhaps is why his love poetry so carefully situates itself outside of marriage. In Elegy IV, The Perfume, seduction opens a realm in which a suitor and his mistress seek to elude parental control and the patriarchal imperatives which support such control. Seduction, in this poem, generates a realm in which attraction, desire and a trangressive exchange of appearances voids and violates the grounding of patriarchy in the "rules" and symbolic role of the father. For both the mistress and her suitor, seductive intimacies had provided them with the pleasures of recognition and transgressive exchange, allowing them to barter signs and appearances and desires in defiance of parental "law:"

Though hee hath oft sworne, that hee would remove Thy beauties beauty, and food of our love,
Hope of his goods, if I were with thee seene,
Yet close, and secret, as our soules, we'have beene.

(9-12)

But the seducer's gift of perfume, by accidentally disclosing these intimacies to the father, allows the double subversiveness of seduction to surface. Intended to captivate the mistress, to reinforce her departure from the authority of her father, the perfume had, by wafting promiscuously through the house, provoked the father, for it manifested to him the violation occurring, almost literally, under his nose. In the dynamics of its appearance, the perfume appeals to the woman at the same time that it signals a breach of authority to the father. For the suitor, the exposure of his transgression of the father's authority causes a more monstrous desire to become manifest--his explicit wish for the death of the father. In the poem's final couplet, the suitor entertains this monstrous desire: "All my perfumes, I give most willingly/ To embalme thy fathers corse; What? will hee die?"

(71-72). The gift of perfume, the signifier of the transgressive bartering involved in seduction, thus becomes very specifically aligned with a desire for the father's death, for the absolute abolition of his power, authority and law. The fact that the daughter can hear this desire, can perhaps share this wish, suggests the force of transgression implicit in seduction for Donne.

This transgressive force results in part from what Stephen Greenblatt has called the "improvisation" of power. According to
Greenblatt, masculine identity in early modern England, at least as represented in literary and other texts, frequently stemmed from the ability of the male subject "to transform given materials into one's own scenario." Greenblatt means that the subject who wished to amplify his or her power could take the conventions, discourses, beliefs, and ideologies of his or her culture and deploy authorial and theatrical skills to align and fashion these materials in ways which seductively influenced others. As part of this process, the subject could use these same skills to re-define him or herself in ways which would augment the rhetorical effect being created. This newly fashioned power worked not by coercion but by infiltration: in order for such power to be generated, the other had to allow the subject's "scenario," his or her fashioning of things, to assume representational dominance (even if that scenario was, in terms of conventional lines of authority, transgressive). Greenblatt's paradigm for the improvisation of power is Iago who, through a scaffolding of trifles, seductively conjures forth and wields Othello's self-consuming, sexual hysteria. Equally paradigmatic, according to Greenblatt, is Richard III, whose notorious and ultimately murderous seduction of Anne implies that at the heart of such improvisations of power lies what I might anachronisitically suggest is a primitive Hegelian dialectic: the aquisition of power by the subject requires the other's negation, requires the other's death. The improvisation of power, then, according to Greenblatt's paradigm and logic, is symbolically (and often literally) an analogue to murder.
Seduction, however, at least as practiced by Donne, though it bears affinities with Greenblatt's notion of improvisation, also differs from it significantly. The most salient difference, perhaps, is that Donne's purpose in seduction is to establish a contentious, even aggressive, symmetry with the woman he desires, not simply to master her or to enfold her within a narcissistically driven misogynous scenario. His desire for recognition, though it uses improvisations of power, is not murderous. To illustrate this point, I will analyze in some detail the English Renaissance text in which the transgressive (and murderous) structure of seduction manifests itself most clearly--Richard III --and then compare it to Donne's most notorious poem of seduction--The Flea. The important scene for my purposes, of course, is the improbable, perhaps "monstrous" seduction of Anne by Richard over the casket of her dead father-in-law, King Henry VI, whom Richard had murdered. Daniel Sibony sees this scene as a paradigmatic instance of the structure and force of seduction, for Richard is able

to seduce the other while he or she is in full mourning, in the presence of a part of him or herself that is lost, and while he is the author of this loss, this outrageous appearance; and yet this is the ordinary and customary enormity of seduction.

(séduire l'autre alors qu'il est en plein deuil, en présence d'une part de lui-même qui s'est perdue, et alors qu'on est l'auteur de cette perte, ça semble énorme; et pourtant c'est l'énorme simple et ordinaire de la séduction.)

32
Through his command of the metaphoric mobility of language, Richard fashions an imaginary realm in which laws and nature and the stasis of grief yield before the captivating, monstrous onslaught of his improvisational language and his rapacious desire for recognition. The seduction is "monstrous" because Richard exhibits such a flagrant disregard for any sense of law or morality rooted in a patriarchal vision of the world.\textsuperscript{33} For Richard, the law lacks any grounding for one simple reason: its symbolic hub, its "father," can be killed, annihilated. By murdering King Henry, Richard figuratively murders the law itself, embodied in both the literal and figurative corpus of the king.\textsuperscript{34} As Anne implicitly grasps, this is an attack on "fathering" in general--on patriarchal law, on patrilineal succession, on an older generation's ability to control the flow and concentration of power to its "offspring," on precisely whom possesses or acquires the force and license to control value and significance within a given social order, on the entire social dimension of recognition. It is not surprising, then, that when Anne curses Richard, even before he enters the scene, she attacks him as a father and attacks his ability to father:

If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view,
And that be heir to his unhappiness!

(1. 2. 21-25)

Anne hopes that nature itself will enact social revenge, preventing Richard from reproducing himself except as a monstrosity. She
wishes that his "fathering" will be so "ugly and unnatural" that it will disrupt the entire scene of fathering (and mothering), preventing his issue from functioning as a narcissistic projection of himself. Instead, Richard's child will reproduce only his own monstrosity, destroying Richard's worth as a father.

But Richard does not want to be a father, at least not in the same way that Henry was. He does not wish to be a "holy king:" that is, a monarch who weds royal and sacred prerogative and enacts this marriage in law. Instead, he wishes to un hinge the very idea of law, to destabilize it, to destroy its conventional authority by opening it to the mobility of seductive language. In a sense, he wishes to destroy momentarily the very possibility of what Lacan has called the "name/no of the father," and the mode of recognition it implies. For Lacan, language as a social matrix begins for each individual when he or she accepts the barring by the "father" of certain demands and desires. This father is not a "real" or biological father, however, but rather is a general principle of negation which intrudes on the duality of the mother-child dyad. The "father"--as language, as difference, as threatener, as a signifier which can arrest the circulation and sliding of other signifiers--interposes himself into what had been a predominantly maternal matrix and gives it a triangular structure; the dualism of the mother and child accedes to the triangularity of familial and/or social life, both founded on the child's appropriation of language and its codes tied to the father's function of negation.

This transition moves the child from the fluxive, specular realm of
primal attachments into the systems and often patriarchal affiliations of discourse and social recognition. Richard rebels in and through the scene of seduction against this immersion, for he not only attacks the symbolic "father" figured by the king, but he also wishes to eradicate the father's "name" and "law" from a most ardent supporter--Anne. He wishes to infiltrate her consciousness with his scenarios, with his transgressive re-ordering of things.

For the seducer, killing the "father" can never, however, be entirely literal. For as Lacan has suggested, the symbolic father is always already dead. That is why killing Henry does not satisfy Richard. Murder, even of the king, by itself does not and perhaps cannot unhinge the law or confer the recognition Richard craves. As Anne's curse shows, the corpse of Henry is enough to sustain a verbal order which still distinguishes holy kings from "that hated wretch" (1. 2. 17) who committed the murder. Richard's task, then, if he wishes to subvert the law, the function of fathering, and the verbal order, if he wishes, in sum, to effectively improvise power, must be to take the place not of the father himself but of the father's name, to replace the patronym and negation represented by the father not simply with Richard's own name but with the equivocating, disseminating discourse of seduction. This is difficult for Richard since he not only has to release the verbal order from its conventional moorings, but in addition must bury the cry of the natural order itself against the fluid avalanche of his seductive overtures. For not only do law and justice and the social
order repudiate his crime but, as Anne notices, the dead flesh
itself of Henry traverses the finality and silence of death in order
to cry out against his improvisations:

O gentleman, see, see dead Henry's wounds
Open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh!
Blush, blush thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells.
Thy deed inhuman and unnatural
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.

(1. 2. 55-61)

This bleeding is perhaps the perfect repudiation of Richard's
figurative act of parricide. First, it physically and magically
undoes the murder. The body drained of blood by Richard's knife
does not remain empty; it retains the power to bleed. And this
power gives to the body another power—to signify. Henry, even in
death, has not been silenced; instead, his discourse becomes more
"perfect" as signifier and signified become one. Though Henry can
no longer speak, his corpse seemingly controls the field of
signification and supernaturally continues to reinforce the verbal
order and its repudiation of Richard. Anne's curse, issuing from
this verbal order, finds its magical counterpart in the corpse's
bleeding wounds. Substance itself, even though dead and inert,
condemns Richard. He is recognized, but only as a murderous
wretch. The signifying corpse thus manifests the pervasiveness of
the father's law which persists supernaturally beyond death both
in the archive of language which sustains Anne, and in the tissue of
the body itself. The symmetry Anne perceives between her voice and the unnatural deluge of Henry's blood shows how this pervasiveness of the law becomes condensed in Anne: it is she who sees univocal signs issuing from the wounds of the corpse; it is she who must articulate the monstrosity of Richard, repudiating him even as Henry's bearers stop their procession at Richard's behest; it is she, then, who becomes the ultimate repository, even the incarnation, of the father's law and must resist Richard's improvised scenarios.

Consequently, if Richard really desires to kill not just Henry but the father's law, it is Anne he must unhinge (violate) through seduction, using seduction not as a game or challenge, but as a path to violent appropriation and recognition. And this is precisely what he does. Sibony suggests that Richard accomplishes his seduction by appealing to the transgressive mobility of the unconscious where the law cannot quell or arrest the monstrosity of pleasure. When Anne reviles Richard for the murder not only of Henry but of her husband, Edward, Richard does not deny the worth of either Henry or Edward within what Anne articulates as a divine order. Instead, he merely asserts his own, monstrous desire—that he replace Edward in Anne's bed, implying the irrelevance of sacred differences in the realm of eros:

Anne: O, he [Henry] was gentle, and mild, and virtuous! Richard: The better for the King of Heaven that hath him. Anne: He is in heaven, where thou shalt never come. Richard: Let him thank me that help to send him thither; For he was fitter for that place than earth.
Anne: And thou unfit for any place but hell.
Richard: Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.
Anne: Some dungeon.
Richard: Your bedchamber.
(1. 2. 104-111)

Richard's audacity is to suggest that his proper place is not that which is designated by the sacred order or even by a desire which flows within the jurisdiction of the father's law, but rather is the very site of transgression, that singular space where pleasure and subversion coincide beyond order or law. For Richard, it is in sexual pleasure that exchangeability and recognition begin. Though he cannot be either Henry or Edward in the social order, no such distinctions obtain in the bedchamber. Anne almost preemptively defines this space as a dungeon, the socially coded space where the father's law walls off that which violates it. But Richard seductively enters Anne's own discourse at this point to revise it, finishing her line by changing this space ruled by law to its precise inverse, a space where law may be deluged by pleasure and all is open to reversal and substitution, a space where Richard can be Edward, can even be Henry, and can potentially change repression to consummation.

But this is only the first step in seduction. Richard cannot expect to succeed solely by suggesting a monstrous violation of the law. He must also change Anne herself from embodying the law to being the infiltrated source of its overturning. To accomplish this, he changes the terms of patriarchal possession. Conventionally, Anne's position as wife and princess should have
arrested her mobility as an object of male desire (and granted her a certain measure of subjectivity). The law that she agreed to in marriage had coddled her and bound her within a specified organization of familial relations. But Richard asserts that Anne's allure had overrun these bounds and made him desire to annihilate the entire world in order to enjoy her bounty:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might sleep one hour in your sweet bosom.

(1. 2. 121-124)

Richard here conjures a regressive fantasy—that Anne's "bosom" is of inestimable value, worth "the death of all the world." Yet he links this fantasy not simply to infantile desire, but also to Anne's "beauty," to her exceptional fulfillment of the cultural "forms" of female attractiveness. Anne, in Richard's language, can thus appear enthralling across the entire spectrum of male desire. Her comeliness, Richard glosses, is complete enough to haunt both his waking world and that of his dreams, and elicits both his current desire and blissful desires lingering from the cradle. And because her beauty is so completely captivating, it calls for a death of the world, since it captures Richard's entire capacity for erotic attachment. Murder, destruction, death all become reasonable masculine responses to such object-obliterating splendor.

Though Anne angrily rejects this overture, it begins a process by which Richard shapes himself to conform to and reflect Anne's
own desires by using, in Greenblatt's sense, the materials at hand. Richard seduces Anne as he becomes a mirror for her, one which oscillates between two modes of reflection. First, as his remarks concerning Anne's beauty demonstrate, Richard attempts to evoke and merge into the narcissistic attachments and idealizations that he believes Anne must harbor. Although he does not know Anne intimately, he knows precisely what these attachments and idealizations are, for the structure of Anne's desire is not private or even fundamentally individual, but rather takes its form from the socially constituted ideals circulated about women. Anne is a woman worth the annihilation of the world. Her beauty is enthralling. Her bosom evokes desiring visions of nurture and life. These are not exactly fresh or even particular observations. But that is precisely the point. Richard understands that what is crucial in this phase of seduction is not tailoring his praise to Anne, but rather in forcing Anne to hear herself aligned with the social paradigms for women that she ought to desire to fulfill. He becomes, in a sense, a reverberation of some of her "interior" voices, voices incorporated from the cultural archive in which she lives, voices which, like Richard himself, long for recognition by the other.

Richard's reiteration of these voices is seductive because they are voices which structure Anne's desires but which she herself is not allowed to entertain explicitly. For Anne to believe that she fulfills her culture's ideals of beauty is equivalent to Anne admitting that she is desirable to men other than her husband, that
her appeal extends beyond the control of her husband or father. Such "vanity" must be repressed because it would signal Anne's recognition that her beauty has an allure that transgresses patriarchal codes and laws. Taking explicit pleasure in her erotic appeal would be dangerous, since it would grant Anne power by allowing her to recognize that she has "worth" and desires that are vastly different than those which have been established for her within the social institutions of family and marriage. Richard presses this very point when he says that her beauty was "the causer of the timeless deaths/ Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward" (1. 2. 117-118). This accusation focuses directly on the paradox of desirability inscribed on and in women. For Anne to admit that she is enthralling is for Anne to admit that other men could love her, desire her, murder for her--that Richard could kill Henry and Edward because of her. Though Richard's articulation of causation here is faulty, both logically and because he hadn't loved Anne, it helps his seduction because it resonates with Anne's beliefs about the consequences of being a captivating woman. Anne's beauty, even if it is a function of certain cultural codes and norms, cannot be registered as such by Anne, at least not openly, for to do so would be for her to admit her value in the realm of desire, a realm which unseats the codes and laws she wishes to uphold. Consciously, Anne repudiates Richard's attempt to designate her as the cause of the murders: "If I thought that, I tell thee, homicide,/ These nails should rend that beauty from these cheeks" (1. 2. 125-126). But in this very repudiation Anne
implicitly aquiesces to Richard's argument. If her beauty caused Richard to murder, then her beauty is at fault and must be obliterated. Her attempt to thwart Richard's advances hangs tenuously on the word "if" through which she denies the actuality of Richard's captivation with her, and consequently his use of such captivation as the determining motivation for the murders. Yet her hypothetical response lays out a course of action "as if" what Richard said were true. Unconsciously, at least, Anne has already considered herself as the reason for Richard's monstrous acts and imagines the consequences of this knowledge. As Richard recognizes, a woman who desires to fit into the "male order of things" cannot help but desire to be beautiful, to enthrall. And it is this strangely unspeakable desire which Richard reverberates, echoes, feeds back to her. In a sense he speaks to her unconscious, infiltrating it and forcing Anne to listen to its desires and allowing them to surface.

But Richard's seduction extends beyond merely reflecting Anne's perhaps partially repressed sense of her own captivating appeal. He also begins to reflect a different desire he intuits in her--that there be no binding law, that Richard and Anne inhabit an imaginary realm in which all boundaries and laws may fluctuate or slide away at the behest of (narcissistic) desire. Richard evokes this realm by calling Anne's attention to semantic slippage in the quintessential legacy of fathering--bestowal of the patronym:

Richard: He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband, Did it to help thee to a better husband.
Anne: His better doth not breathe upon the earth.
Richard: He lives that loves thee better than he could.
Anne: Name him.
Richard: Plantagenet.
Anne: Why, that was he.
Richard: The selfsame name, but one of better nature.
Anne: Where is he?
Richard: Here. [She] spits at him.

(1. 2. 138-144)

The exchange centers on Richard's repeated intimations and assertions that the prospect exists for Anne to replace her dead husband with a better one, and that in spite of the death of her husband, Anne herself still has desires. But Richard is not concerned simply with reminding Anne that she might remarry; instead, he links the notion of replacing Edward with a "better" substitute to a more general and pervasive principle of exchangeability and indistinction. His initial overture, even though it tries to assert benign motives for his own acts of homicide, points Anne towards the "lawful" possibility of a widow acquiring an improved, second husband. This mode of substitution is culturally acceptable and licensed. Anne's response suggests that while a second husband might be possible in principle, Richard's assertion that he murdered to give her a better husband is nonetheless false, for there is no one who can be described as "better" than Edward; no one can replace him. But Richard, in his rejoinder, ties Edward and his unnamed replacement together by using one term to designate both—"he." Even though Richard retains his rhetoric of value, he begins to suggest through his use
of pronouns that perhaps exchange is without reserve, that not even language can absolutely separate Edward and his possible replacement. Anne intuits this thrust, and parries by directing Richard to "name" Edward's replacement. But by giving Richard the power to name a substitute, she tacitly admits that such a substitution is possible. Richard then enters into the rhetorical space Anne has given him (reinforced metrically by his appearance in "her" poetic line) and gives the surname his father, the Duke of York, had taken for himself, Plantagenet, which also happened to be a patronym designating the royal lineage of Henry and Edward. Anne finishes the poetic line by accepting Richard's designation--thinking that it refers to Edward--not recognizing how Richard has slipped his thinking into her verbal space. Two lines later, when Richard finally designates himself as "Plantagenet" with what I would imagine is a primal indexive gesture, he clinches the ideal of both radical semantic slippage and male exchangeability. Not only can a man be replaced by his better, but even his name is not his own. Edward and Henry have nothing proper to themselves--life, a realm, a name, a wife or daughter-in-law--that Richard cannot usurp. The name-of-the-father thus has no real power, for it cannot separate the father's offspring from the father's murderer, or keep "Lancaster" and "York" absolutely distinct. Without patronym or law, how can Anne know whether or not Richard is Edward's "better?" Richard's seduction and Anne's responses have already loosed the moorings for such judgments, opened a realm in which the narcissistically charged appearances
of both Richard and Anne and an abject desire for recognition begin to hold sway.

Anne, however, still desires to cling to Edward, to Henry, to the law. But she now realizes that language, the very material of law, will not support her, for it has been infiltrated with exchangeability, with indistinction, with Richard, with seduction. Consequently she resorts to a more primal, less diacritical means of expression--she spits. By spitting, she makes a last attempt to designate Richard, to signify her disgust and anger at the thought of substituting him for Edward. She also, more figuratively, desires to designate her authority, transgressively appropriating the patriarchal (phallic) connections between power, signification and ejaculation. Spitting becomes, curiously enough, the final refuge of the patronym and the law itself. In addition, by spitting, Anne wishes to expel the arguments, the seductions, the unconscious voices that Richard has surreptitiously slid inside her. But she cannot expel him, for as Anne herself acknowledges to Richard, "Thou dost infect my eyes" (1. 2. 148). For Anne, seduction and infection intertwine because both involve the unleashing of alien forces within the self which run counter to the self's dominant or conscious organization. Richard is like a subversive substance, invading her "eyes" and opening her gaze to fantasized constructs and desires the law suggests she should not see. Richard's "infection" of Anne succeeds because he appeals precisely to what in her does not mesh with her culture's version of the law of the father. In a
sense, he opens her psychic organization to the mobility of seduction, to the monstrous prospect of desire and exchange without law, to his version of things.

Yet even after having "infected" Anne, Richard's seduction of her has not entirely succeeded. He still must complete the improbable conversion of Anne's mourning, whose essence resides in the belief that what has been lost cannot be replaced, into an acceptance of exchangeability. He accomplishes this by suggesting not only the inability of language or law to enforce crucial social and personal distinctions, but also by augmenting Anne's increasing sense of her own ambivalence in relation to the law. When Richard finally gives Anne his sword, he gives her the power to enact the vengeance she has been calling for:

Nay, do not pause, for I did kill King Henry,  
But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.  
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed young Edward,  
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.  
(1. 2. 179-182)

Here Richard makes Anne explicitly confront her confusion of desires. On the one hand, he gives her the power physically to uphold the law. With sword in hand, she can vent her aggression, become the embodiment of the law, and destroy the monster who has suggested the exchangeability of her dead husband and the absolute insignificance of her murdered son. She can, in a sense, momentarily become a man, with the same options for vengeance and the same codes to guide her. On the other hand, Richard
recognizes that for Anne to destroy him would require that Anne be willing to destroy the verbal mirror that continually echoes back to her the grandiosity of her beauty, the world-annihilating value and psychological power of her appearance as a woman. To kill Richard becomes a murder of a part of herself to which she is fiercely, if unconsciously, attached; to kill Richard becomes, through the logic of seduction, the murder of her own narcissistic desire for recognition. Richard's audacious move to give her his sword is a strategic and covert appeal to this narcissistic desire, for what Richard gives her, perhaps for the first time, is momentary omnipotence, the grandiose phallic power to choose between the law and narcissistic desire, between her desire to kill and her desire to have desire. The difficulty of this choice becomes manifest when she drops the sword unable to kill Richard, yet still expressing her desire to do so. Richard, however, does not relent, ordering her, if she truly wishes him dead, to "bid me kill myself, and I will do it" (1. 2. 186). In a sense, he exchanges himself with Anne, giving over his power (verbal, phallic, even judicial) to her, putting himself in a position of impotence, and again making her decide whether she wishes to become the repository and upholder of the law or a beautiful woman immersed in the desires of seduction. She chooses, guardedly, the latter, without entirely abandoning the law or her belief that discourse opens upon and can ascertain truth:

Anne: I would I knew your heart.
Richard: 'Tis figured in my tongue.
Anne: I fear me both are false.
(1. 2. 192-194)

What Anne ponders here, however, is not simply Richard's honesty but the status of the mirror he has shaped through his improvisations. Is it real, or is it mere appearance, and hence false? Richard's reassurance, that his heart is "figured" in his tongue, pointedly fails to clarify the question. But for Anne the decision has already been made. Though she continues to doubt Richard, she reservedly accepts his ring, advising him that "to take is not to give" (1. 2. 202). Yet in spite of her reserve, mourning and law ultimately dissipate before Richard's seductive powers. Edward and Richard can be exchanged.

Richard himself mulls the monstrosity of his seductive performance in a speech that converts the scene of seduction into an assertion of his own grandiose subjectivity:

What! I that killed her husband and his father To take her in her heart's extremest hate, With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes, The bleeding witness of my hatred by, Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me, And I no friends to back my suit at all But the plain devil and dissembling looks, And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
(1. 2. 230-237)

For Richard, seduction is a game of omnipotence and destruction. It is not, however, played out against the father himself, for he is mortal and can be killed all too easily; rather, it is played out against the father's name and law, embodied in Anne. As
Marguerite Waller has recognized, however, Richard not only seduces Anne, he also seduces himself. In his retrospective meditation on the scene, Richard desires to convert the nuanced transgressiveness of seduction into a narcissistic ground of identity. He wishes to imagine the scene of seduction as a scene of recognition and truth, transforming the seductive realm from an arena in which power and identity are contested as appearances, to an arena that serves only to establish Richard's belief in his own subjective omnipotence. But to have such omnipotence, and to believe in its truth, Richard must annihilate the seductive realm itself. He must convert the ephemeral successes of his improvisations into the more stable, more conventionally authorized, medium of narration. And since Anne, once conquered, once subordinated, loses her ability to confer additional power on Richard, he decides that he must eliminate her: "I'll have her, but I'll not keep her long" (1. 2. 229). Richard's self-seduction and his belief in its truth ends the mobility, the exchangeability and the subversiveness of the seductive interchange, and reaffirms a version of male force and law first signified by Anne's acceptance of the ring. For Richard, Anne is not the subject of his desire; rather, she is merely the means through which he can begin to try to align his improvisational power with more conventional structures of authority and recognition. And in order to secure that alignment, Richard knows that he must kill Anne, for if she remains alive, she will retain some power even though, through marriage, he can appropriate her place and authority. For Richard,
then, seduction has no value in itself; its meaning occurs only through a larger, narratival drive for absolute power and recognition which can succeed only by annihilating the other. In Richard's dream of omnipotence, seduction becomes a form of murder; it is merely a viscous, ephemeral strategy in his narcissistic climb to power. The goal of improvisation for Richard is absolute authority, absolute recognition, and he will obliterate Anne, without qualms, to get it. For Richard, power is all; there are no other pleasures.

II

Seduction, for Donne, is not driven by the same desire for autonomy, power and authority that moved Richard. Even in as overtly aggressive a poem as *Elegie XIX*, Donne's prurient solicitations do not assume or require capitulation by the woman; the poem is an open-ended, if offensive, game of seduction, and as such manifests but indefinitely defers the poet's dream of sexual possession. *The Flea*, Donne's most renowned poem of seduction, also defers sexual possession. In the poem, the would-be seducer flirts with the transgressive dynamics that informed Richard's seduction of Anne, but without trying to institute the fantasy of omnipotence which ultimately consumed Richard. The implied scene with which the poem begins (though in many important ways the scene is unspecified) suggests a familiar dynamic of seduction. A waggish man seeks to persuade a woman to engage in intercourse. The woman, though apparently willing to listen to him, overtly resists his overtures. It is not surprising, then, that
the man opens his seduction by trying to subvert the woman's silent "no" and the laws he imagines have produced it:

Marke but this flea, and marke in this,  
How little that which thou deny'st me is;  
It suck'd me first, and now suck's thee,  
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sinne, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,  
Yet this enjoyes before it wooe,  
And pamper'd swells of one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than wee would do.

(1-9)

Traditionally, as John Carey has noted, flea poems were often "a smutty joke" in which the flea functioned as a stand-in for a lascivious male gaze that desired intimate access to women's anatomy. In Donne's poem, however, the seducer is not directly interested in the visual contours of the female body. Instead, he seemingly focuses on the flea itself--its behavior, its imagined internal processes, its sudden tumescence. This interest in the flea, however, is not an end in itself, but serves as a staging for a related but less obvious focus: the seducer's desire to use the flea to suggest a realm of almost infinitely mobile appearances. For the seducer, the flea, unlike the imagined woman, functions as a non-resistant site of inscription which simulates the exchangeability of appearances that occurs in seduction itself, a mobility of appearances that will allow the subject to question the propriety of law and of the woman's resistance. The poem's opening imperative--"Marke but this flea, and mark in this"--
performatively calls attention to the flea as a site of inscription, as something that can be "marked." The seducer imagines the flea, in a sense, as a blank slate, a paradigmatic space on which and in which to generate and manipulate appearances. Since the flea, as "figure," dominates the poem, it suggests the ubiquity of simulation in seduction. The flea, however, is not the only site of inscription suggested by the opening imperative. The demonstrative pronoun "this" at the end of the line does not, syntactically, have any clear antecedent. It may refer to the flea, or perhaps to the flea's mingling of bloods, or perhaps to the poem itself. But without an accompanying empirical gesture, one which poetry cannot provide, "this" refuses to refer to any one thing. Thus the "marking" that receives double emphasis in the opening line suggests not any simple, indexive use of signs, as it might first appear, but rather a more seductive interworking of signs in which it is difficult to tell exactly what is "marked" or when such "marking" indicates anything that has to do with truth or reference.

The seduction itself begins with the seducer's effort to mobilize and play with appearances. In the second line, for example, the diminutive size of the flea becomes analogous to the act of intercourse. Sexual intimacy, which the woman feels is significant enough to limit, defer or deny, is no larger, and implicitly no more telling, than a flea bite. Similarly, when the flea responds to its natural appetites with the "promiscuous" sucking of blood, the seducer glosses this behavior as simulating the sex act itself. He even pushes this analogic play further. Since
the flea has already accomplished the mixing of bloods, such an act appears as a triviality that has already happened rather than as a cultural act to be surrounded with taboos: "It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee, / And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee . . . ."46 The seductive slippage between the flea's sucking and intercourse are reinforced in the visual marks of the poem itself. As Docherty has noted, the use of the long "s" in early modern script, which closely resembles a small "f," creates a "titillating ambiguity" each time the word "sucked" appears.47 Almost imperceptibly, sucking resembles and slides into fucking. The flea thus becomes the simultaneous subject of natural appetite, sucking, and the taboo-fraught cultural act, fucking. The fact that in the poem fucking and sucking simulate each other, literally occupy the same space, suggests the seducer's willingness to teasingly subvert cultural conventions and separations. By ambiguously writing "fuck'd" whenever he writes "suck'd," he trivializes the taboos--against treating intercourse as a natural act, against writing the word "fuck'd" in a poem--that make seductive banter necessary. The seducer wishes to establish that the separations between culture and nature, between a flea sucking and a man and woman fucking, between feeding and sexual consummation, between proper and improper forms of writing, have no propriety in the discourse of seduction. All become interchangeable.

The seducer uses the flea and its "natural" simulation of intercourse to subvert the law and its desire to define and limit
what is proper in sexual exchanges. When the flea sucks, he tells
the woman, "Thou know'st that his cannot be said/ A sinne, nor
shame, nor losse of maidenhead . . ." Like Richard, the seducer
provocatively appeals to the woman on the basis of what he
imputes to be her own knowledge. A flea's sucking, since it is a
natural act, cannot be proscribed, nor can it support the weight of
moral law attached to analogous acts in humans. The natural, the
seducer affirms, eludes the cultural, allowing pleasure without a
repressive backlash. Of course this notion of the "natural" is itself
a seductive construction, a manipulation of appearances. But it
allows the seducer, as Sibony suggested with Richard, to raise the
possibility of what might conventionally be construed as an
unseemly pleasure.48 For Donne's seducer, this pleasure results
from a strange tumescence associated with sexual play: "Yet this
enjoyes before it wooe,/ And pamper'd swells with one blood made
of two . . . ." Like the previous blurring of sucking and fucking, the
trope involves an implicitly transgressive conflation. In this
rendering of eroticism, the differing realms of male and female
"swelling" occupy the same verbal space. Overtly, the trope
suggests pregnancy. But the "wee" in the following line suggests
that the flea's swelling mimes a tumescence in both partners. In
erotic play, the male pleasurabley swells as he is "pamper'd."49
Implicitly, then, the male prelude to consummation, erection,
subtly resembles the portended female outcome, pregnancy. The
man and woman not only share blood in the flea, but through that
sharing, their most visible bodily responses to erotic activity
simulate each other and coalesce. Within the sphere of seductive pleasure, "pregnancy" becomes in itself an eroticized condition, a site of sexual pleasure, analogous to erection. In the sexual act, the seducer implies, both partners are "pamper'd," that is, over-indulged with food or "spoiled by luxury."\(^{50}\) Sexuality, like a flea sucking blood, becomes a jubilant act of feeding in which both partners may imagine themselves growing "fat" on the blood they figuratively take from the other; and the swelling that attends this feeding is part of the pleasure.

The woman responds to these audacious challenges to play with and undo conventions, laws and distinctions by resorting, as Anne had done, to a gesture which seeks to nullify, or perhaps merely forestall, the seducer's mobilization of appearances. She moves to kill the flea. For Donne's seducer, this act confers a certain degree of recognition.\(^ {51}\) She values his banter enough to respond to it in a way which engages its seductive play. Tactily encouraged, the seducer floods her with more seductive banter:

\begin{quote}
Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, yea more than maryed are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.

Though use make you apt to kill mee,
Let not to that, selfe murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.
\end{quote}
\(10-18\)
Throughout this stanza, the seducer dallies with blasphemy. The flea, identified as consisting of "three lives in one" like the Trinity, becomes the site for a waggish defiling of the law and the crucial distinctions on which it depends. In the flea, the sacred and the profane become one. The appearance of the Godhead becomes analogous to the imagined mixing of blood in a flea, and the flea's tiny exoskeleton becomes the cloister and "marriage temple" which marks sexual union as holy. As a simulation of the Trinity, the flea inverts its previous appearance in the poem. Unlike the first stanza, where the flea signified the "natural" and its sinless violation of the law, the flea here becomes the law's incarnation. In a blasphemous sense, it becomes the *logos*. But significantly the flea embodies a *logos* without negation. Within the "temple" of the flea, parental resistance to a daughter's sexuality (perhaps the quintessential act of fathering), and the daughter's assumed embodiment of that resistance, have no force. Though parents and the desired woman "grudge," the inscription of the sacred on the flea has already allowed a simulation of sexual union to occur in a domain which is marked by culture yet eludes taboos. Purely material union--the mindless mixing of bloods--consequently can appear within the holy. Thus the father, the role of the father, and the godhead itself are figured in the poem as appearances without force, for they have no differentiating function: they do not negate. They are merely signs which momentarily surface in or around the flea.
It remains, then, for the woman to take the part of the "fathers" and assert the value of the distinctions and separations which they should uphold. She does this by maneuvering to kill the flea, a gesture which recalls Anne's cursing and spitting at Richard. And though she does not manifest the violated outrage of Anne, her silent gesture implies a provocative or perhaps playful resistance to the seducer's banter. As was the case with Anne, however, the woman's resistance signifies a partial reception and recognition of his discourse. By mobilizing against the flea, she indicates that she has "marked" the seducer's attempt to manipulate the flea's appearance; she has heard and responded to his badinage. He is, in some sense, worth interrupting. Her gesture also suggests, however, that her response to his rhetoric is not passive; her apparent desire is to control the seductive inscriptions that the seducer visits upon the flea. Yet within the realm of seduction, even a gesture that attempts to annihilate seduction becomes an appearance, and as an appearance, its meaning is mobile, reversible. The seducer therefore can temporarily assimilate her gesture within his discourse, making her the perpetrator of "sacrilege" and blasphemy since her gesture to kill the flea simulates a desire to murder the Godhead—"three sins in killing three." Rather than supporting the law and fathering, the woman becomes, within the seducer's continuing badinage, the perpetrator of their annihilation. It is she, not he, who audaciously attacks the sacred realm of reference and law. It is she who takes on the
impossible appearance of being at once the law's repository and incarnation, and also the subject of its potential overturning.

For the male seducer, however, the alluring mixtures of aggressivity and acquiescence, of transgression and fidelity, and of recognition and resistance which he imagines in woman do not reflect in any immediate sense structures of identity or subjectivity that necessarily reside in women; instead, it merely reveals how woman in her otherness appears to the seducer, and how he may desire her to respond to him. Seduction is not an effect or act of representation. Instead, it manifests the mobility of appearances which emerges from the seducer's wish to solicit some form of recognition from the other he imagines woman to be. What the male seduces, or attempts to seduce, is, at least in part, his own unconscious which he locates and identifies in woman. For Donne's seducer, the woman is not simply an empirical or dialectical other. As he himself states, "this flea is you and I."

The flea tacitly appears, then, as an imaginary space where self and other both contend and converge, where spatial conflation can suggest possible congruence in the realm of desire. But in The Flea Donne does not allow the woman to merge into his desire. In a sense, the flea, while functioning as a site of identification, also sustains the differences between the seducer and the woman that allow her to function as an other, and not simply as an other self. When she kills the flea, for example, the woman intimates a desire for closure and consummation that the seducer will not overtly entertain. She mimes, in a sense, the sublimated aggressivity of
his seduction, and garners from it her own murderous (or perhaps flirtatious) pleasure, a pleasure that differs from the verbal pleasure the seducer gets by producing his badinage. Through this gesture, she doubly displaces the flea. On the one hand, she takes on, in a sense, the role of drawing blood ascribed to the flea and refigures it as an act of aggression and control. For the moment, at least, in the silent space between stanzas, it is her indexive "marking" of the flea which is final, not the seducer's. On the other hand, by killing the flea, she discloses to the seducer that the flea, the "space of otherness" he creates, is always doubly marked. It is not simply an appearance shaped or appropriated by the seducer; rather, it is a space which is also mobilized and contested by the woman, by the other. Even if the seducer's desire at one level is to imagine an identification of self and other, he nevertheless acknowledges that there is always another desire which instigates and sustains the scene of seduction.

The woman in the poem thus functions not as a representation of woman as such, even for Donne, but rather as a figure who stimulates and simulates male imaginings and desires about the dynamics of fidelity and transgression, of desire and identification. In the woman he imagines seducing, Donne's seducer projects, distorts and recreates his own desire to violate the law, and to see that violation as issuing from the very figure he establishes as the law's final refuge. But he also imagines this implicitly narcissitic project to be inflected by what he entertains as the woman's desire which surfaces in her murder of

Let not to that, selfe murder added bee . . . ." The seducer waggishly imagines the woman as incarnating the typically male conflation of sexuality and murder. Sexual "use" by the woman will "kill" the tumescent male. But the seducer links this conventional anxiety to a less conventional impulse towards suicide. Through the woman, the seducer simulates his own disavowed desire for "self murder." Within the drama of the poem, killing the flea, sexual use and suicide all become means by which the woman, in the seducer's figuring of her, pleases herself. But her pleasure, through identification, is also the seducer's pleasure. He desires not merely to have her, but to be her and to be recognized by her. When he seduces, the seducer himself wishes to see himself in the position of impossible, unseemly pleasure where love is murder, murder is pleasure, pleasure is simulation and simulation circulates between the inscription and subversion of the law.

Unlike Richard, however, Donne's seducer does not seek to escape the realm of seduction and return to a realm of narratival mastery in which such anxiety may be alleviated by killing or appropriating a desired woman. Consequently, in the poem's final stanza, the seducer articulates the continuing mobility of power and appearances even after the woman has killed the flea: "Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou/ Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;/ 'Tis true, then learne how false feares bee" (23-25). The identification that occurs in this would-be seduction does not tend towards merger or an obliterating assimilation of the female by the male; instead, it is sustained through the
working of mobility and exchangeability. As the poem continues, the seducer mimes his desire to be the woman by interchanging "objects" with her--triumph, power, the licensing of signs. It is precisely this interchange that Richard dreams of escaping in his soliloquy following his seduction of Anne. Donne's seducer, however, continues to articulate a verbal arena in which the exchange and intercourse of appearances does not involve expenditure or loss. In the poem's final lines, the seducer envisions a realm in which the patriarchal code, and the notion of "honor" which synecdochically disseminates it, can cohabit with sexuality without a violation of either: "Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,/ Will wast, as this flea's death took life from thee" (26-27). The woman, even though she "yeeld'st" to the man, can do so without loss as long as sexuality remains enmeshed in the realm of simulation. For within this realm created by seduction, honor will not "wast" as a result of sexuality because both consist entirely of appearances. Even the seducer's desire that the woman "yield" to him sexually may elude any simple patriarchal imposition of dominance, for if such yielding remains in the realm of seduction, that is, if it appears only as a simulation of yielding, it does not need to submit to oppressive conventions of masculine power. Sexual yielding, in this sense, may not involve the valorization of masculine authority. The fact that Donne's seducer does not "win" the woman, that she retains a silent autonomy throughout the poem and beyond its ending, suggests how the pleasures of seduction for Donne depend on the
resistance, the challenge, the mobility and the power of woman. It also suggests how, for Donne's seducer, the rhetoric of seduction is not oriented towards the closure and improvisational mastery that captivated Richard. For Richard, the monstrosity of seduction was in its ending, when Anne no longer needed to be challenged and could be consumed. In *The Flea*, however, the seducer (and the woman) forestall and perhaps avoids such consummation. The drive in the poem is not towards closure, whether aesthetic or sexual. Instead, its drive is towards receiving and conferring recognition, and towards imagining the seductive pleasures of braiding together transgression of the law and less obvious identifications with it, with fathering and with the woman whom the seducer wants to have, to be had by and to be. Because of this ambivalence, seduction potentially licenses for Donne what might be imagined as woman's own desire--a desire to be recognized but not to yield, not to become a passive space impressed with male desire or authority or improvisations of power.

III

In this context, Donne's seducers may appear to be more complicated and less rapacious than critics such as Fish or Docherty suggest. For not only does woman oscillate along an axis between the Same and Other in a poem such as *The Flea*, she also appears as a seductive challenge to that axis. In woman, even as the seducer imagines the possibility of a simulation of his desires, he also imagines and must imagine the impossibility of their gratification. The woman in *The Flea* may never become the
mirror that the seducer may, at some level, wish her to be. Though
evoking the seducer's desire to use the other as a figure to reflect
attempts at self-definition, the woman resists being enclosed
within the seducer's specular axis. Unlike Richard, who in the
closure of seduction views Anne as a mirror for his fantasy of
narcissistic omnipotence, Donne's seducer imagines in woman the
possibility of a transgressive mobility of appearances that
difracts the whole dynamic of projective identification. Though
the woman in The Flea functions in part as a screen for the
seducer's aggressive, eroticized desires, her silent, gestural
provocation of the seducer displays her non-coincidence with his
projections. She never allows his discourse to find or seductively
construe her as a stable referent or looking glass even though she
grants it (and him) a certain level of recognition. This resistance
is the means of her seduction of him, for it is the woman's ability
to challenge her suitor's projections and seductions that provokes
him to seduce and to continue to seduce; it gives her recognition
value. And this seduces him because as long as the seduction
continues, recognition can continue and he can defer the death of
intersubjectivity that perpetually drove and eventually haunted
Richard. In seduction, Donne will not meet Richmond at Bosworth
Field.

The resistance to closure in The Flea, however, does not mean
that Donne always represents seduction as eluding closure. He can
and does imagine seducers who fantasize about mastery through
violence. In Satire II, for example, while in the process of
surveying the corruptions of the "towne," Donne's cynic laments a change in the technique of seduction:

One would move Love by rithmes; but witchcrafts charms
Bring not their old feares, nor their old harmses.
Rammes, and slings are now seely battery,
Pistolets are the best Artillerie.
(17-20)

No longer, apparently, can men seduce women by "rithmes," by the alluring music of poetry. Nor can they move Love by the intrinsic power of signs, by the magical force of appearances. Instead, love can only be moved through battle. Not any type of battle will succeed, however. Old tactics such as trying to "ram" one's way into women prove "seely"--feeble and frail. Seduction now consists of a less immediately "physical" form of violence and battery. Women are captured by "pistolets," a term which signifies both pistols and certain foreign coins. In this portrayal of seduction, commerce and coercion coincide without regard for the woman who is to be won. Violence is seemingly "lessened" by the deployment of new weapons against women, with the persuasive power of coin replacing brute force as a means to effect consummation. Yet it remains jarringly obvious in the pun on "pistolets" that violence remains as the force producing consummation. For the narrating cynic, the decline of seduction into violence is supposedly lamentable, but his outlook is pragmatic rather than sympathetic: his primary concern is with articulating what works "best." Women, undesignated and unnamed
in the passage except as "Love," become the resistant but winnable victims of at least three forms of male privilege: physical, economic and verbal power. Women become targets to be "hit" by displays of masculine force in the quest for recognition, not figures of mobility and resistance to be engaged, desired, identified with and seductively recognized.

But to read all of Donne's seductive evocations of women as replicating this mastering desire is simplistic. To show how an understanding of the dynamics of seduction destabilizes such readings, I will examine portions of Fish's reading of *The Comparison*, an elegy which does involve woman's vulnerability to male projections. The poem consists of an extended act of paralleling and comparing two women--the poet's mistress and that of a rival. Initially, the poem suggests that the comparison will be simple; the poet's mistress will garner approbation and the rival's execration. But as Fish rightly notes, the differences between the women are not as sure or unequivocal as they initially appear, for "in place of the absolute scale promised by the initial act of comparison, we have a sliding or analog scale in which the same quantity bears different values depending on its place in the sequence of the reading experience."58 What Fish means is that when the poet compares his mistress to his rival's, the very terms of the comparison fluctuate in their significance and import as the poem proceeds. What should be a simple process of differentiation, exalting one's own mistress while defaming another's, becomes quite complicated and ultimately problematic.
At times, even an "ideal" reader could scarcely tell the women apart:

Thy head is like a rough-hewne statue of jeat,
Where marks for eyes, nose, mouth, are yet scarce set;
Like the first Chaos, or flat seeming face
Of Cynthia, when th'earths shadowes her embrace.
Like Proserpines white beauty-keeping chest,
Or Joves best fortunes urne, is her faire brest.

(19-24)

The passage seems at least somewhat clear at the outset.
Initially, the head of the rival's mistress is being scorned. Her
features, "rough-hewne" and "flat seeming," lack the
distinctiveness which one associates with beauty or even
individuality. Barely sculpted, her face lacks differentiation,
fading, like the moon during eclipse, into the nullity of
nondescriptness. Yet as Fish suggests, when the poet mentions
"Cynthia," even this relative clarity immediately dissipates: "On
the one hand Cynthia, in her role as controller of tides and bringer-
in of storms, is a proper figure to bring up the rear of a list that
includes Chaos; but on the other hand, Cynthia is also the figure of
female chastity. Like everything and everyone else in the poem,
she participates in both of the directions that are supposedly being
distinguished, and her multivalence reaches out to affect
Persephone, who arrives in the next line . . . ."59

It is hard, as Fish points out, to assign terms univocally to
either mistress, since in the ongoingness of the poem they seem to
shift from one to the other. The treble reiteration of "like" in lines
19, 21 and 23 accentuates this ambiguity. The first use of the term in line 19 introduces the simile which mocks the rival mistress' head as resembling a "rough-hewne statue." The second use creates a second comparison, linking the mistress to the equivocal figure of "Cynthia." As Fish suggests, "Cynthia" is not quite so easily assigned to the rival's mistress, since the term has both positive and negative valences. Though the name appears to lean towards signifying the rival's mistress, in fact it rather promiscuously adheres to either. The third "like" furthers this trend towards polysemy, for it does not merely flirt with ambiguity--it is immersed in it. Initially, this "like" suggests a continuance of the series of similes and metaphors through which the poet has lampooned his rival's mistress. This implication is reinforced by the poet's use of a parallel construction to link this use of the term to its previous appearance in line 21. In both places, "like" begins not only a line, but a grammatically autonomous couplet. Syntactically, then, this third "like" seems to continue and supplement the basic thrust of the passage--its denigration of the rival's mistress. But by the time one finishes the couplet that this third "like" has introduced, the comparison seems to have veered away from the rival's mistress and waffles towards the poet's own. It is her breast which is (or should be) "faire." It is she who should resemble Proserpine and her "beauty-keeping" chest. But this designation is never absolutely sure. By suspending the grammatical subject for the duration of the couplet, leading with a simile rendered radically ambiguous by its
syntactical position, the poet forces the mistresses momentarily to blur together, to occupy the same tropological terrain. The mounting ambiguity of "like" in its three appearances in this passage can be seen, then, to provide a touchstone for a more pervasive process (which I would call seductive) in which categorical differences themselves become questionable.

This blurring of terms and names and mistresses captivates both Fish's attention and his wrath. He calls Donne's performance in this poem "amazing . . . a high-wire act complete with twists, flips, double reverses, and above all, triumphs, triumphs at the expense of the two women who become indistinguishably monstrous when the poet makes it impossible for us to tell the difference between them."60 The hyperbole here is telling. Not only is Donne's poetry malignant because it is aggressively masculine, but more significantly it is malignant (and "monstrous") because it toys with, challenges, perhaps even overthrows the notions of identity and difference. The women, within the poem, become an overlapping set of verbal appearances, not singular beings with individuating attributes. This mobility of appearances makes the women "monstrous." Nothing but appearance, they possess no identity which would allow them to function as autonomous, self-fashioning subjects, or, and this is a point that Fish doesn't make, as individuated objects of male possession. Perhaps the lack of stable distinctions between the women is monstrous not only because it undermines any basis for their subjectivity, but also because it suggests that the notion of
identity itself is only a seduction. For the poet, the women function much like the flea had. They become highly mobile figures who, in their own lack of identity, unleash the play of appearances in seduction with no real import of their own.

When Fish reflects on the poem's final assertion that "comparisons are odious," he decides that "[t]his is a moment of revulsion, not from the women for whose features he is, after all, responsible, but from the act by which he makes of them (and us) whatever he wills." In other words, Fish suggests that the poet is repulsed by his own seductive discourse. But this interpretation is disingenuous. Donne's final couplet does not simply repudiate comparisons, it instead asserts that comparisons will cease when the poet and his rival reach a point of solidarity—when both repudiate the rival's mistress:

Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus,  
She, and comparisons are odious.  
(53-54)

The poet, then, has not totally abandoned his misogynous denigration of his rival's mistress. She still appears odious, at least for as long as she remains a screen for the contention between the poet and his rival. Comparisons, then, are odious, not because "they are too easy," as Fish asserts, but because they affirm and exacerbate rivalry between men, rivalry which the poem registers in the relative merits of each man's mistress. Fish's failure to read the poem's final couplet in its entirety, whether intentional or not, accords with his relative neglect of the
masculine rivalry in the poem while emphasizing its blurring of
the mistresses. As a consequence, he sees only part of the
seductive dynamics of the poem, and fails to note that the blurring
together of the women's appearances is a prelude to a second
attack on difference—the poet's effort to blur the distinctions
between himself and his rival.

The Comparison is not an attempt to seduce a woman; instead,
it is a subtle attempt to seduce and be recognized by a man. It is a
poem that focuses on women, but whose dramatic impetus comes
from the tension between the poet and his imaginary rival. The
comparison between the mistresses serves two non-commensurate
roles in this staging of rivalry. On the one hand, the poet uses the
supposed superiorities of his mistress to challenge and "best" his
counterpart. His mistress is beautiful, his rival's is loathsome. On
the other hand, however, he uses fairly conventional attacks on his
rival's mistress not only to denigrate her, but also to appeal to a
common misogynous imagination in order to establish connections
between himself and his opponent. The fact that the mistresses
ultimately blur together and interchange at times underscores this
tendency by the poet to induce almost subliminally the appearance
of similarity and to mitigate difference. When the poet asks his
rival "Doth not thy fearfull hand in feeling quake, / As one gath'ring
flowers, still feares a snake?" (45-46), the expressed sentiment,
that within a women's beauty lurks the possibility of treachery, is
not merely commonplace but archetypal. And the poet has already
hinted at an appearance of such archetypal treachery in relation to
his own mistress:

Round as the world's her head, on every side,
Like to the fatall Ball which fell on Ile,
Or that whereof God had such jealousie,
As, for the ravishing thereof we die.

(15-18)

Though tonally the poet is less condemnatory here than he is later
when he evokes his rival's mistress, he still makes an explicit
connection between his own mistress' beauty and the Edenic apple.
Through this allusion, he introduces an archetypal basis for male
rivalry and its link to sexuality. The Edenic fruit becomes not
simply something to be eaten but to be ravished, that is, something
to be plundered or appropriated sexually. God becomes jealous, a
rival, murderous when the apple of his eye is raped by his
"children." It is interesting to note at this point that the pronoun
"we" is used here for the first time in the poem (it is only used
three times). In this male act of ravishing, of pillaging from the
father, there is a first slight implication of solidarity between the
antagonists. This solidarity between the "sons" issues from their
common (and constitutional) transgression of the father's law at
the behest of seduction. Both the poet and his rival have been
seduced by and "ravished" what is God's; both are consequently
under the curse of death. Both, in this way, are the same. And if
the poet's mistress is like that apple, that site of temptation and
betrayal, then she tacitly resembles the rival's mistress whom the
poet articulates as more overtly "false." Their mistresses, even in areas which should distinguish them, subtly exchange appearances and mirror each other.

The seduction of the rival, however, surfaces even more explicitly towards the end of the poem where the return of the term "wee" induces a strange, almost homoerotic ambiguity:

Is not your last act harsh, and violent,  
As when a Plough doth a stony ground rent?  
So kisse good Turtles, so devoutly nice  
Are Priests in handling reverent sacrifice,  
And such in searching wounds the Surgeon is  
As wee, when wee embrace, or touch, or kisse.  

(47-52)

The passage opens by referring to the violence of the sexual act for the poet's rival. But this violence is only significant as it appears within the envelope of male experience. There is no concern here for the female "ground" on which this violence is visited, only for the phallic plough which has to cut through the earth's treacherous, stony resistance. Implicitly, the poet identifies with his rival who must work so hard to "open" his mistress for insemination. The next couplet, however, begins a rapid escalation of ambiguity beginning with he term "so." Is it a conjunction suggesting that what follows continues the violent figuration of sexuality put forth in the preceding couplet? Or is it an adverb modifying "kisse?" The difficulty in assessing this syntax relates to a difficulty in assessing what kind of transition is being made between the two couplets. Has the poem switched its focus back
from the rival to the poet and his mistress in the second couplet? This seems likely, yet the second couplet's inaugural "so" continues to resonate backward with the preceding couplet. And the figurations of sexuality related in the trailing couplet do not vanquish this perplexity. On the one hand, the kissing "Turtles," seem to suggest a less violent and invasive sense of sexual contact which perhaps the poet would like to imagine as proper to him and his mistress alone. Penetration and its aura of violence vanish in the gentle kissing of doves. But curiously the trope that follows returns to violence. For the priests, though "devoutly nice" in handling their "doves," nevertheless sacrifice them, kill them. Introducing the priests also suggests a shift from individual love to collective expressions of male desire. Through the priests, the poet presents a version of how men can collectively handle their beloved objects--and this collective handling involves imitation and sacrifice. For priests, there is little difference or distinctiveness between the objects to be sacrificed. Once they can be designated as sacred, they effectively blur together. Whether they be tainted, as scapegoats, or without blemish, the subjects of sacrifice merely have to fit into a designated pool of potential exchangeable victims. The import of sacrifice is to enhance the solidarity of the priests and the community they represent, not to reverence the sacrificial victims themselves. By directing their aggressiveness towards the doves, the priests minimize the aggression and rivalry that might exist between them, projecting it onto the victims they kill. And by comparing
acts of love to priests reverencing their sacrificial objects, the poet emphasizes male solidarity rather than the superiority of his love for his mistress, a solidarity which depends on displaced violence and murder.

The final couplet in the passage does not arrest the poem's slide into ambiguity. First, the couplet continues to link love with a form of violence: "And such in searching wounds the Surgeon is/ As wee, when wee embrace, or touch or kisse." Though the surgeon apparently invades the bodies of others with less violence than a plough invades the earth, he remains wedded to mode of touching which penetrates the body of those he tries to heal, focusing on their wounds. So even if the poet wishes to assume surgery as a metaphor for his particular mode of intimate contact with his mistress, it is not clearly opposed to or differentiated from the "ploughing" that he attributes to his rival. Both imply an aggressive masculine probing which imagines mastery over a "natural" feminine body that needs to be "opened" to give it or sustain its life. Another ambiguity surfaces in the second line of the couplet when the poet uses the term "wee" for the second and third time in the poem. In its first use in line 18, it linked men together as ravishers of God's apple. Here, the term is more equivocal. Initially, it seems to refer to the poet and his mistress and their particular mode of intimate touching. They, unlike the rival and his mistress, turn penetration into acceptable tactile intimacy. But syntactically the "wee" seems to designate more properly not the poet and his mistress but strangely the poet and
his rival. The "wee," in this reading, echoes and revises the second person mode of address used earlier in the poem. By moving from the "your" of line 43 to the "wee"s of line 52, the poet performatively shifts from a mode of address which differentiates to one which seductively blurs. The "wee," even though it may refer to the poet's mistress, subtly engenders (or un-genders) an arena of inclusion in which male similarity arises around a way of treating women which resonates with (and partially disavows) masculine aggressiveness. Both the poet and his rival, when they embrace or touch or kiss their women are like surgeons--invasive but healing, a male fantasy that minimizes the "wounds" caused by phallic aggression, reducing intimacy to surface contact.

This cryptic identification of poet and rival, however, does not arrest either the seduction or the ambiguity of the passage. For if "wee" can refer to the alliance between the poet and his addressee, maybe the erotic interplay performed by the "wee" can refer to them as well. Perhaps there is a flirtation with the homoerotic in this penultimate couplet. While this dalliance is not overt, it surfaces strongly as soon as the equivocity of "wee" is recognized. Conceivably the diminishment of sexual violence in the surgeon trope is related to this subliminal emergence of the possibility of homoerotic contact. When men love men, the couplet seemingly suggests, they can "embrace, or touch, or kisse" without the same appearance of phallic intrusion that renders male-female contact suspect. Both men, with surgical tools in hand, can search wounds without tearing, for in this possibility of love, rivalry dissipates.
As the poet's rival substitutes for his mistress as a potential lover, male anxiety over the sexual act drops to a tolerable level. No longer does one have to worry about trying to bore "the dread mouth of a fired gunne" (39), which seems to be the inevitable threat that follows the poet's dream of giving himself over to "the cherishing heat her best lov'd part doth hold" (38). Instead one can imagine a realm of male similarity in which an ambivalent flight from women becomes a seductive prerequisite to the foreclosure not of simulation or seduction, but of reference, comparison, and rivalry: "Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus; She, and comparisons are odious."

The entire poem can be read as a seductive challenge to comparisons and the laws and codes which ground them. Mistress blurs with mistress, the poet's lover eventually blurs with the poet's rival, and finally the rival and the poet himself cryptically meet in the imagined similarity of their desire. Seduction thus becomes a means of both recognizing, challenging and diffusing the threat of rivalry inherent in engagements with an other, displacing heterosexual anxieties with a drive towards homosocial recognition. In this scenario, the other, as rival, becomes simultaneously a figure of provocation and identification. In seduction, as both The Flea and The Comparison suggest, the other, even though identified with, cannot be assimilated. He or she cannot become the disposable mirror that Richard imagines Anne to be without placing the seducer himself back in a patriarchal realm which desires his annihilation for the attack on
law he undertakes in seduction. In addition, in neither Donne poem is their an attempt to establish male subjectivity around a "fixing" of woman as both Docherty and Fish suggest. Instead, it is the mobility of woman either as a seductive provocateur or as a transgressive figure of indistinction which provides at least part of the challenge that elicits Donne's seductive poetics (and, in The Comparison, suggestions of sexual anxiety). The other part of the challenge is patriarchal law, its transgression, and the potential rivalry that such transgression poses. One might think here of Donne's poem, Sapho to Philaenis, which explicitly mixes identification, seduction, transgression and the desire for recognition as its poetic impetus.66

I might mention here that this mix of transgression, identification and and a desire for recognition are precisely the mechanisms that inhabit Donne's poetic attempts to seduce patrons. The exaggerated praise in the verse epistles strongly accords with the dynamics of seduction that I have suggested. In Mad paper stay, a poem addressed "To Mrs. M. H." (Magdelene Herbert), Donne, as in The Flea, dallies with woman's role as upholder of the law and also as the source of erotic pleasure:

But when thou coms't to that perplexing eye,
Which equally claims love and reverence,
Thou wilt not long dispute it, thou wilt die;
And, having little now, have then no sense.

Yet when her warme redeeming hand, which is
A miracle; and made such to worke more,
Doth touch thee (saples leafe) thou grow'st by this
Her creature; glorify'd more than before.

(13-20)

Superficially, the poet is engaging in typical epideictic versification. The poet woos the patron on the grounds of her perfection. She is both sacred, claiming reverence, and desirable, claiming love. Thus she fulfills an ideal of woman, embodying a cohabitation of law and desire without conflict. At this level, the seduction is obvious and overweening. But the poet's "mad paper" has its subtleties and transgressions too. At the beginning of the first quatrain cited, the poet indicates that the "eye" ("I") which will read the poem is "perplexing." One reason for this, perhaps, is because the "eye" lays equal claim on love and reverence. In other words, it is heterogeneous, intricately comprised of two differing registers of value and attraction. As the quatrain proceeds, these registers begin to split as the poem itself becomes impotent before the female gaze: "Thou wilt not long dispute it, thou wilt die." Prior to the line's caesura, the poet invokes the language of religious or legal controversy. The poem cannot resist the patron's eye because it cannot "dispute" with her. After the caesura, the language of disputation gives way to a more erotic language in which the poem itself, perplexed but captivated by the woman, "will die." The poet here uses a shopworn pun on "die" to foreshadow a transgressive claim concerning sexuality. The woman produces a desire for erotic attachment, one which will kill either through her rejection or consummation. This erotic subtext
surfaces even more explicitly in the second quatrain, when the poet refers to the patron's "warm redeeming hand" and how it will make his "saples leaf" grow to be "her creature." This implicitly phallic growth registers, in accord with the structure of seduction, a monstrous pleasure which neither the poet nor the woman will or has to acknowledge. Through his "mad paper," the poem presents the woman with a screen for an exchange of erotic signs. The "miracle" in this process is that seduction imagines a realm in which the language of religion it deploys is merely a mobile appearance that both simulates a realm of law and sacred distinctions and allows such a realm to be continually transgressed. The woman's touch, which can glorify the "mad paper," will produce an epiphany, if recognized, which is much more sexual than sacred. Thus the "platonic" idealization of the patron can be seen, in some sense, as a veil for the seductive improprieties which follow.

Identification and mirroring also figure in the seduction, emerging most explicitly in the poem's final quatrain:

I bid thee not doe this to be my spie;  
Nor to make my selfe her familiar;  
But so much I doe love her choyce, that I  
Would faine love him that shall be lov'd of her.  

(49-52)

Still addressing his "mad paper," the poet articulates the desire to imitate his prospective patron. What he wishes to suggest is that her "choyce" is his, establishing an absolute congruity between
them in which the woman can see, through his imitation of her, the value and priority of her judgments and desire. She becomes valuable because she compels him to identify his desires and choices with hers; she thus becomes his paradigm of desire. He, in turn, becomes valuable, if the seduction succeeds, because he provides a mirror for her, acknowledging and valorizing her own narcissism and desire for recognition. In the seduction of a patron, however, this imaginary seductive reciprocity is complicated by the poet’s implicit desire to have his worth reflected not by mirroring or by verbal compliment, but by money. Consequently, the seducer wants to produce a non-reciprocal exchange of signs and recognition. He circulates appearances which simulate and stimulate her desire; in turn, he wishes that she circulate to him monetary signs. Thus, as in almost all seduction, there is an attempt to provoke a circulation of what the seducer imagines the other has in excess, here turning the woman from a potential rival he would envy because she has what he desires to a patron he can seductively identify with, adore and from whom he can receive recognition.

This brief, brief sketch can only hint at the ubiquity of seductive dynamics in Donne’s verse epistles. What it is does suggest, however, is the fundamental complexity that permeates almost all of Donne’s seductive quests for recognition. In the verse epistle, the urge to seduce issues implicitly from a lack. The poet seduces, we surmise, because he needs money and favor from the woman he wishes to establish and/or sustain as a patron.
But this inference raises a more complicated question: is a lack all that causes Donne to seduce? Is Donne merely a slightly more benign version of Richard, audaciously striving to close the gap between masculine power and authority through the mastery and domination of women (as some of his more roguish poetry might suggest)? Is Donne's interest in women merely an improvisation of power? To unfold these questions more fully, I will turn to Donne's poetry of love where the desire for recognition finds its gratification in a dream of symmetry, not in explicit attempts at domination. It is this dream, I believe, which reveals, beyond traditional lines of social power, ambition and authority, the axial structures of Donne's desire, a desire which is, unlike Richard's, resolutely (even if contentiously) intersubjective.

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2Quoted by Jordan, p. 4.

3See Lawrence Stone's analysis of what he calls the "reinforcement of patriarchy" which he believes occurred during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England (The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England: 1500-1800, abridged edition, New York: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 109-146). Jonathan Goldberg comments on how James I's desire to contract absolutist claims to power where reinforced by his appeal to "fatherly authority," using the familial to legitimate the political, so the exchange of tropes was, at least at times, reciprocal ("Fatherly Authority: the

4Jordan, p. 4-5.

5Jordan, p. 4.

6It is worth noting that the resemblance between political and familial authority is, at least at some level, problematized by Elizabeth's tenure as queen, a monarch who, in her own words after the destruction of the Spanish Armada, told the victorious troops that she had "the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the stomach of a king and the king of England too" (quoted from Susan Bassnett, *Elizabeth I: a Feminist Perspective*, Oxford: Berg, 1988, p. 74-75).


8Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baille, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 237-240. For Hegel, the identity established through this objectification of the other "is itself only a state of evanescence, for it lacks objectivity or subsistence" (238). In other words, once the other becomes an object, once its subjectivity is totally negated through the master's enactment of power, it no longer has the independent subjectivity to confer recognition on the master. In the subordination of the slave, the master strips the slave's recognition of its value, undermining the selfhood constituted through that subordination.


10Docherty, 52.

11Docherty, 52.


13Fish, 228.

14James Holstun's essay, "Will you rent our ancient love asunder?: Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton" [English Literary History, 54, (1987) 835-867], also follows this mode of analysis. In his interpretation of Sappho and Phiaenis, he initially separates its lesbian version of love from what he sees as the more typically patriarchal cast given to love in Donne's other love poetry: "Sappho's love poem fails to exercise the aggressive and seductive force we typically expect in the universe of Donne's love poetry, where language is a medium of power by which men speak and women listen, men signify and women are signified" (837). But ultimately there is no difference between Sappho's love and that of Donne's male speakers. In both, the subliminal dialectics of masculinity prevail since Holstun concludes that the poem masters lesbian "eroticism by subordinating it to a patriarchal scheme of nature, history, and language" (838). In Donne's poetry, according to Holstun, the hegemony of a rigid version of patriarchy is universal.

15Even Queen Elizabeth herself seemed to understand that power in early modern England was mobile and relatively ungendered during courtship and seductions, but condensed strongly in men after marriage. Perhaps this is why she resisted marriage herself but continually welcomed suitors. Susan Bassnett argues that had Elizabeth married, "she would have remained Queen but still have found herself in a subservient position to her husband . . . " (40). Bassnett adds that "by remaining a virgin Elizabeth could avoid the risk of being seen as the inferior partner in a marriage relationship . . . . she could refuse marriage and subjugation and still keep all her
prestige" (124). Thus, games of seduction without marriage vested Elizabeth with power that eluded the patriarchal authority which could dominate even a queen.

16Hegel, 238.

17Bourdieu asserts that "linguistic relations are always relations of symbolic power" (his emphasis, Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1992, p. 142). He also argues that "even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific social authority, and an audience, which recognizes this authority to varying degrees, as well as between the groups to which they respectively belong" (142-143). I would argue, however, that there is much more latitude between power and authority than Bourdieu would suggest, in other words, that power is not always determined by authority.

18Bourdieu, 167-168.

19Bourdieu, p. 171.

20de Beauvoir implicitly recognizes this, but encompasses this male desire for a certain autonomy in Woman within her elaboration of the almost infinite flexibility and mutability of the self-Other dialectics inherent in patriarchy (197-208). One might suggest, however, that in this recognition of autonomy, the dialectic fundamentally changes; man is not then looking to master women, but seeks women's help in freeing himself from the patriarchal codes which, at times, oppress them both.


22The notion of the occulted attraction and provocation of signs is the central principle of analysis in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's The Wolfman's Magic Word: a Cryptonymy, trans., Nicholas Rand, Minneapolis: U. Minn. Press, 1986. As they reread the history of Freud's notorious patient, the Wolfman, they find an uncanny
seductive relation working between certain signifiers in his elaborations of his primal scene, a seductive relation that crosses the boundaries of national languages, metaphorical similarity, and the truth of memory. Abraham and Torok find in the Wolfman, then, a language of seduction rather than representation. This recognition of a language of seduction haunting the language or reference and truth is perhaps the real "truth" of psychoanalysis, even if it is rarely brought to consciousness, even by Freud.

23Baudrillard, 91.

24Baudrillard calls it "a radical metaphysics of simulation" (91).

25This does not mean that seduction necessarily ends with sexual consummation, though this may be the case. Sexuality can itself become an appearance within the seductive exchange. Seduction disappears from sexuality when sex is consumed in all senses of the word.

26Elaine Hoffman Baruch notes that, in general, a woman's "real" power ends when she either consents to or refuses a love overture (Woman, Love and Power: Literary and Psychoanalytic Perspectives, New York: New York U. Press, 1991, 59). For Baruch, woman's power is psychological, rather than economic, political or social, and extends as long as the play of seduction continues. "What literature richly illustrates," she asserts, "is the paradox of women's psychological power, often exerted through love, paired with political and economic impotence" (11). My only disagreement is that woman's power, fragile as it often has been, is more concentrated in seduction rather than love, for in seduction woman's choices are not constrained by the force of her desire.

27Iago's seduction of Othello works by putting Othello in the very position of the father whom his own seductive discourse had violated. As patriarchal husband,
Othello seeks to close off the very appearance of power in Desdemona that seduction had opened. Murder thus appears as a reactive male attempt to restore negation to a realm violated by the female affirmations unleashed in seduction.  


29 At issue is the suitor's desire to elude the societal and parental controls condensed in the father that determine the exchange of women. His hope is that the woman would be able to free herself from the patriarchal (paternal) matrix in which they both dwell, so that she (and implicitly he) can determine her "love" in the interchanges of seduction. This does not "free" her in any absolute sense, however. It simply allows her to choose a new "scene" in which the forces of attraction and separation tied up in gender relations take on a more individualistic cast as they play themselves out, a scene which has its own potentially negative consequences for women. 


31 Greenblatt, p. 227. 


33 Sibony tacitly makes this point, 27. 

34 Jonathan Goldberg has shown that with the rise to monarchy of James I, royal and patriarchal power merge in a particularly forceful way ("Fatherly Authority," 3-32). Though *Richard III* was produced prior to James' rise to power, it was written in a
milieu in which patriarchy and monarchy often flowed into the same channels of
discourse.

35 For a more technical and nuanced investigation of the "name-of-the-father" see
Anthony Wilden's commentary in Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in
270-284.

36 Sibony, 28.

37 See Sibony, 28-29.

38 See Snow.

39 Richard is not, however, as Sibony would have us believe, speaking to a woman's
unconscious (22-23). Rather, he is speaking to what a man imagines inhabits a
woman's unconscious. Because such an unconscious is at least in part socially
constituted, Richard may have access to certain common structures which inform
the unconscious of both men and woman. But Richard, and Shakespeare, can only
imagine what such an unconscious contains and must *identify* with the imaginary
desires of the woman which they themselves have constituted. In this sense,
seduction is always, in part, self-seduction. Richard seduces Anne by suggesting a
monstrous pleasure that appeals perhaps more to masculine identifications with
woman than with woman as an other. On the problems of a unitary idea of the
unconscious and the dynamics of identification, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The

40 My analysis differs here slightly from Marguerite Waller's assertion that "Richard
and Anne and many of the play's commentators are seduced by the dream of a
common language in which the radical potential of this heteronomy [of languages] is
suppressed--my commitment is to the subversion of such suppression" ("Usurpation,
Seduction, and the Problematics of the Proper: A 'Deconstructive,' 'Feminist,' Rereading of the Seductions of Richard and Anne in Shakespeare's Richard III," in Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Differences in Early Modern Europe, ed., Margeret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, Nancy J. Vickers, Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1986, 161). Though I agree that both Anne and Richard wish for such a language, they also, particularly in this scene, confront the effects of another language, one which isn't "common." The dream of a common language is thus traversed by its more monstrous double--the language of seduction which imagines the self not as "the unproblematic origin or source of . . . speech and actions" (168), but as an appearance generated in a contest of appearances with the other. Waller's assertion that Anne's role "will be greatly determined by the insatiable need of such a 'sovereign' subject to set up for itself new chanllenges to surmount in an ever-intensifying evasion of its own unraveling" forgets that Richard and Anne both receive an implicitly monstrous pleasure in this very unraveling. The energy of the seduction scene is not simply Richard's. It is tied to Anne's own seductive slippage away from a patriarchal language that would define her identity. This transgressive power in Anne is not merely derivative from Richard, but issues from her own dream of an "other" language which would define female subjectivity differently than the patrilineal language she commonly uses and consciously supports.

41See David Bakan's interesting discussion of disease and "telic decentralization" in Disease, Pain and Sacrifice, Boston: Beacon Press, 1968, 3-53.

42Historically, the marriage between Anne Neville and Richard was enmeshed in politics, and almost certainly with patriarchal uses of women as well. That is not Shakespeare's emphasis, though it plays at its margins.

43Waller, 172-174.

Carey, 132.

In several manuscripts and the 1669 edition of Donne's poetry, the line reads "Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee." The variant, however, does not undermine my analysis.

Docherty, 54. A. J. Smith, in his edition of Donne’s poems (*John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, New York: Penguin, 1971), notes that in some manuscripts the modern "s" appears at the beginning of "suck'd," eliminating the visual pun (376). However, in many manuscripts and in the printed editions, the long "s" appears. My sense is that the pun is Donne's and was relevant for the majority of his contemporary readers.

As *Farewell to love* makes clear, this pleasure may not prove gratifying, even for the man.

Donne's use of the term "pamper'd," however, suggests that the erotic pleasure figured in the flea is not "genital" in any simple sense, but recalls the entire realm of bodily pleasure associated with infancy and early childhood--with the various pleasures men receive by being "mothered."


Roy Roussel suggests that at issue in the poem is "the experience of pleasure as a form of interruption" which he defines as a "feminine" mode of enjoyment: the poet "discovers himself in a feminine experience of disruption, in the multiplicity of particular, heterogeneous pleasure which can never be integrated to form a whole" (*Conversation of the Sexes: Seduction and Equality in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1986, p. 5). In other words, the woman provides the poet with an other pleasure, one which differs from the masculine quest for unity and
coherence. It is this other pleasure, this other voice, that makes the poem what Roussel has called, in what I would consider to be hyperbolic language, "a conversation between equals" (7). Nevertheless, it is the open, non-appropriative interest in the other which Roussel identifies that changes the dynamics of improvisation in the poem from a quest for masculine authority into what really can be considered a seductive exchange.

The trope also suggests the imaginary confluence of mother, child and father in pregnancy, another means by which the seducer cheekily frames sexual consummation not as a particular act, but as an acceptance of man's almost "inevitable" appearance within woman—as blood/food, as seed, as other. The seducer wishes to secrete thereby the potential masculine invasiveness of intercourse within what is for him the mysterious couplings of the womb.

Seduction, however, does not simply reproduce the dynamics of projective identification, for in seduction all that is projected remains desirable. Seduction is not a defense; rather, it is an elusive affirmation of the jammed wishes for transgression, mobility and fidelity.

Borch-Jacobsen, 17.

It is worth noting that Borch-Jacobsen argues that gratification or pleasure is not a primary motivation of desire; rather, imitation is (26-48).


Donne's elegie Going to bed generally fits this pattern as well, with colonization becoming a conscious motif in the seducer's desire to "myne" his love object.

Fish, 226.

Fish, 226.

Fish, 226.
Fish, 226-227.

Fish, 227.


I see more residual violence here than does Carey, who asserts that "[a]n image such as that of the surgeon's probe inserted into the woman in 'The Comparison' unites the technical and the tender" (144).

Christopher Ricks, in his recent essay "Donne After Love" (in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed., Elaine Scarry, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1988), links some of the aggression towards women which emerges in Donne's poetry with a "dislike of having come" or "postcoital sadness and revulsion" (33). His analysis is marred, however, by his unwillingness to read this "revulsion;" instead, he distances himself from the dynamics of the poem with moral indignation: "the end of *Aire and Angels* strikes me as an offense--against women, against men, against love, and against the poem which it wantonly degrades" (38). In another place he writes more generally that "postcoital sadness degrades the poems' own deepest understandings" (65). It is interesting to note the ease with which Ricks assumes that "postcoital sadness" is not part of the poem's "deepest understandings." Since Ricks represses this possibility, it is not surprising that his strongest attacks on Donne are aesthetic: "it isn't so much that Donne is a cad to women . . . . , but that he is corrosively unfaithful to his poems" (64). As with Fish, Donne's "problems" are primarily formal rather than psychological or ideological. In Fish and Ricks Donne produces strange bedfellows.
One might also think here of Nature's lay Idea, in which the poet imagines in his
desperate seduction that he possesses Godlike powers of inscription, but also
recognizes the power of woman to transgress such inscription and thus to provoke
his seduction. Even though he tries to control her appearances, her non-coincidence
with his formulations gives her a seductive power over him. What he desires is her
freedom and also the position of the other whom he imagines as having access to
that freedom. He imagines their monstrous pleasure, identifies with it, and only
regrets that such pleasure is not his. For a creator, seduction becomes the desired
and disavowed realm of the other.


Luce Irigaray in Speculum of the Other Woman, trans., Gillian Gill, Ithaca: Cornell U.
Press, 1985, argues that men dominate women precisely by imagining women as
symmetrical (but lesser) versions of themselves, as specular objects, as forms of the
same. This way of seeing, according to Irigaray, submits women to a narcissistic male
order which obliterates women's materiality and real otherness from men. While not
disagreeing entirely with Irigaray, I think that her reading of male desire is overly
reductive and fails to note the modification and transformation of male desire and
perhaps even ontology in and through the female other. Although women may not be
recognized fully for what they are by men, they are not, at least for Donne, simply
specular products of narcissistic male fantasy.
Narcissus in the Other: Sexual
Trouble and the Dream of Symmetry

The desire for recognition is an inflection of the will to power. At least, that is what critics attempting to analyze the literary productions and figures of early modern England frequently assume. In many cases, such as that of Shakespeare's Richard III, Edmund and Lady Macbeth or slightly later, Milton's Satan, such an assumption is largely accurate: the lust for power and authority is explicitly coupled (however ironically) with a longing for recognition. The drive for prestige and status is murderous, all-consuming and involves audacious, reckless and often wanton attempts to usurp or improvise power. Recognition exists, for such characters, only when it can be wrested, seduced or extorted from others. But recognition is not, as I have been arguing, invariably (or even perhaps fundamentally) a function of mastery. For when recognition involves the forced debasement of the other, it becomes, as Hegel himself recognized, a form of death not only for the oppressed, but for the oppressor as well. The other, once conquered, can no longer confer recognition that has sufficient value for the conquerer. In such a system of power, recognition becomes an ephemeral illusion which disappears in its very creation. There can be no effective
intersubjective attunement between master and slave, or between the improviser of power and his or her victims.

For Donne, the relation between recognition and power frequently does not fit this model. In poems such as *Sapho to Philaenis* and *The Extasie*, poems which I will examine in some detail later in this chapter, recognition, in its most ideal form, is not primarily an effect of hierarchy. Instead, it arises from what I shall call a dream of symmetry, a particular way of imagining love as an act of intersubjective attunement. In this version of love, recognition arises in the rapture of an entralling and interanimating unison between self and other. Lovers, captivated by their uncanny likeness, by their spectacular homology, glory in this vital doubling. While seduction strives to conjure an *appearance* of symmetry through its badinage while strategically using the asymmetries between seducer and seduced to further its intent, love, at least as represented by Donne, imagines and believes in a commutuality that approaches mystery. In this wondrous enigma of love, the differences and tensions between lovers momentarily seem to vanish into the bliss of attunement and shared recognition. The world contracts, time slows, and a dreamy ecstasy of "interanimation" temporarily weds the lovers. The dream of Narcissus thus passes into and through the other. This is the version of love and recognition that has gratified and seduced many of Donne's critics. Helen Gardner, for example, in the introduction to her edition of Donne's love poetry, asserts that "Donne has a claim to
the title of our greatest love poet."¹ She makes this judgment largely because "he has given supreme expression to a theme that is rarely expressed in lyric poetry . . . the theme of the rapture of fulfillment and the bliss of union in love."² Here, love occurs in the absence of conflict, in the absence of difference, in the absence of hierarchies of power.

But as is usually the case with Donne, nothing, not even love and its relation to recognition, is simple. In The Canonization, for instance, one of Donne's most renowned poems of love, love's mystery arises from a complicated mix of fantasized intersubjective likeness, imaginary death, sexual consummation, sexual complementarity and, at a certain level, sexual unease:

Call us what you will, wee'are made such by love;
   Call her one, mee another flye,
We'are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
   And wee in us finde the'Eagle and the dove.
   The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
   By us, we two being one are it.
So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit.
   Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can dye by it, if not live by love,
   And if unfit for tombes and hearse
Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse . . . .
   (19-30)

Love here involves a dream of symmetry, but it involves other things as well. Most significantly, perhaps, love here includes sexuality, and sexuality is the model, the form, which underlies the attribution of a transcendent likeness to self and other.
Unlike Donne's poem *The Relique* which in its recollection of loving symmetry denies genital contact--"Comming and going, wee/ Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales;/ Our hands ne'r toucht the seales . . . ." (27-29)\(^3\)--*The Canonization*, through its repetitive punning on the verb "die," roots sexual consummation at the very heart of the mystery of love. At play in this mystery of consummation is a subtle oscillation between symmetry and complementarity on the part of the lovers. Initially, they are symmetrical. Figured as both flies and candles, they pursue each other with an amorous, deadly zeal, extinguishing themselves on the other's strangely phallic fire. Arthur Marotti, following A. B. Chambers, notes that flies in Donne's time were considered as unrestrainedly sexual and may have been thought to be hermaphroditic.\(^4\) Given that both lovers are also said to be "Tapers," a tacitly phallic image, gender difference fades before the sameness of their form and desire.

The poem, however, quickly supplements this desiring symmetry with a figural identification that still asserts symmetry but which also strongly evokes complementarity (and, perhaps, opposition and even hierarchy). When the poet asserts that the lovers find in themselves "the'Eagle and the dove," his syntax implies that each lover metaphorically finds each bird in both self and other. The lovers, in their symmetry of desires, each possess the predatory aggressiveness of the eagle and the submissiveness of the dove.\(^5\) But the difference between eagle and dove also suggests conventionally imposed configurations of
gender asymmetry, with a potentially ravening, active masculinity opposed by a passive, hunted femininity.\textsuperscript{6} 

Donne's dream of symmetry thus becomes haunted by its more rapacious double—a longing for sexual appropriation, for a power-bearing affirmation of masculine desire against female difference. Helen Carr suggests that "the tension between assertion of masculine strength and union of reciprocal giving is enacted again and again in Donne's poem's of mutual love."\textsuperscript{7} In this poem, that tension is both evoked and muffled, for as soon as Donne allows it voice, he invokes the "Phoenix ridle" to transform asymmetry into implicitly hermaphroditic union: "wee two, being one, are it." 

The lovers, in the pyre of sexual consummation, unite. But even this affirmation of union is immediately revised. For the conclusion that the poet draws from the phoenix trope is that "to one neutral thing both sexes fit." The notion of "fitting" strongly suggests sexual complementarity, union in and only in the joining of difference, not symmetry. But strangely the oscillation between symmetry and complementarity continues, for in the next line the poet reaffirms the symmetry of the lovers in sexual consummation: "Wee dye and rise the same . . . ." Because the model for mutuality in the stanza is sexual, the lovers' relation continually jostles between symmetry and complementarity, between sameness and difference. The erotics of heterosexual love apparently preempts the fantasy of asexual symmetry reverenced in \textit{The Relique}: "Difference of sex no more wee knew,/ Than our Guardian Angells do" (25-26).
The oscillation in the stanza between complementarity and symmetry, which is also an oscillation between being gendered and ungendered (or being over-gendered--hermaphroditic), relates intimately to the stanza's coupling of love's mystery with death. For the lovers, mutual captivation and the desire for consummation prove both ravishing and destabilizing, even annihilating. The poet himself suggests the unsettling quality of love in the final stanza when he imagines an acolyte invoking him as one "to whom love was peace, that now is rage" (39).\(^8\) Cleanth Brooks, in his famous reading of the poem, argues that death and sexuality conjoin in the figure of the phoenix only to articulate the transcendent paradox that in love, "we can afford to trade life (the world) for death (love), for that death is the consummation of life."\(^9\) But the poem makes no such simple affirmation. Immediately after articulating the lovers as phoenix-like in their mysterious unity, the poet reverses the import of the phoenix myth, suggesting that love does not engender resurrection--the death and return of the Same, of an identity--but rather an annihilating transformation: "Wee can dye by it, if not live by love/ And if unfit for tombes and hearse/ Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse" (28-30). Erotic love, apparently, cannot just be, for it immolates the lovers as sexual and sexualized beings. The rapture of consummation is a rapture of death--of male autonomy, of gendered difference, of the stable asymmetry of individuation. Against the possibility of this death, the poet displaces love and sexuality into verse,
converting the potentially destabilizing effects of sexual rapture into stylized reminiscence, into culturally valorized verbal forms--legend, sonnets, hymns. If there is a trade in the poem, it is not simply a trade of the world for love, as Brooks would have it, but an exchange of the perplexities of sexual consummation for the distancing and relatively "public" realm of aesthetic articulation. Paradoxically, in the poet's recourse to verse, Donne retreats not from the world to love, but from love to the world, from the desire to fulfill himself with a woman to the desire to receive recognition from auditors. In many ways, the poem is not a celebration of love but a submission and transformation of love according to pressures issuing from public (homosocial) codes of value.

The poem also suggests the way that sexuality disrupts the potential for amorous symmetry to gratify the poet's desire for recognition. In the combustible abyss of intercourse, love leads not to the pleasures of intersubjective attunement and engagement but rather towards obliteration and death. Self and other become conflated to "one neutral thing," and this union implicitly annihilates the value of the other as other. The woman, like the poet himself, is represented as being entranced with the consuming fire of sexuality, with eros itself, and not with the other per se. Mesmerized by her own obliterating desire, she is not captivated by him, apparently, in a way that confers sufficient recognition. Consequently, for the poet, recognition is partially split off from love and from the woman.
He must seek it elsewhere. Thus he resorts to a conventional gesture, seeking recognition through his verse, displacing both the insufficiencies and pleasures of sexual love into a longing for posthumous, public acclaim, into a longing for attunement from his imagined audience.

This memorialization of and retreat from love manifest the poet's sense of sexual love's insufficiency. The immolating rapture of the third stanza cannot cloister the lovers from the intrusive "presence" or implicit judgments of the imaginary auditor or of the scrambling court-defined world he represents without "killing" the lovers in the process. The poet remains more attentive to public scrutiny than to his lover. Even in the poem's final stanza where the lover's contract into being "one another's hermitage," they do not fully displace the world for each other. Unlike a poem such as The good-morrow, in which "love, all love of other sights controules,/ And makes one little room, an every where" (10-11), love in The Canonization is not miraculously expansive. Part of the reason for this difference, perhaps, is that in the The good-morrow's formulation of love, love and sexual consummation differ. Instead of depicting love as an erotic conflagration which interlaces symmetry with complementarity and life with death, The good-morrow depicts it as being fundamentally visual, based on an almost hypnotic sense of symmetry between self and other and the rapture of mutual attunement:
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheres
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike that none doe slacken, none can die.  

(15-21)

The stability and expansiveness of love in the stanza clearly depend on an ideal mirroring relation between the lovers. If they are "not mixt equally," their love can "slacken" and die. Given Donne's frequent puns on the rising and falling of the penis and on orgasmic "dying," his diction here seems to implicate sexuality in the unequal mixing that kills love. If the lovers "love so alike," if they are and remain in specular unison, then their love can continue in the wonder of mutual visual recognition and reflection. There is, of course, an element of narcissism in this version of love--when each lover looks in the other's eyes he or she sees primarily a reflection of the self--but it is a narcissism which is framed by and requires the other; it is intersubjective. The image of the self enthralls not only because it allows narcissistic contemplation, but more importantly because it is a reflection which resides in and through the loving other, allowing love of self to coincide with love of the other. Significantly, the moment that the poet imagines that this fantasy of loving homology is disrupted, the moment that the lovers are differentially individuated or sexed, the poet also imagines their (his) love as slackening and dying in a sort of
post-coital ennui. His world-displacing love apparently might not survive sexual consummation and its potential to disrupt the poet's dream of symmetry (sexuality conjures in Donne, fairly relentlessly, fears of women's infidelity, her failure to recognize him). Concerned that his lover will warp into gendered, alienated otherness through the effects of heterosexual consummation, the poet dreads the desolation of symmetry caused by sexual dying.

In *The Canonization*, however, the poet specifically denies that love's insufficiency is linked, for him, to sexuality and its troubling of the dynamics of intersubjective attunement. Instead, he subtly connects this insufficiency to his own ambivalent stance towards the world and what it can offer. On the one hand, he seeks to memorialize love and cloister it away in verse, defiantly affirming and defending its mysterious and almost sacred value to his courtly auditor. On the other hand, his main desire in the poem seems to be not love at all but the approval, the recognition, of the very auditor he supposedly wants to leave him alone. Arthur Marotti interprets the poem as an attempt by Donne to compensate "for his socially inferior position by exercising intellectual and rhetorical mastery over his coterie readers" who Marotti assumes are the counterparts of the poem's imaginary addressee.\(^\text{10}\) The poem, according to this view, is an act of compensatory, improvised power. It would be hard to tell, however, whether in such an arena of power the poem is an act of mastery or supplication. For it seems that the mystery of erotic conflagration posited in the third stanza
serves as a means for the poet to attempt to justify his ambition-stunting vulnerability to love, to sexuality, to Woman--his worldly impotence in the wake of love's rapture. The poet engages the auditor in order to explain his willingness to "die" with a woman, and then to reiterate that "death" in poetry. Marotti suggests that Donne's portrayal of love as a mystery of resurrection and union beyond death strives "to put the listener at the mercy of the speaker and to assert the intellectual authority of the ironic poet." But it also puts the poet at the mercy of the auditor who has already implicitly criticized the poet's love and received the poet's exasperated response: "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love . . . " (1). The poet's defiant articulation of love's mystery is a seductive attempt to displace the values and desires that inform the auditor's objections by vesting love with a transcendent power unmatched in the courtly realm. The problem for the poet, however, is that this love gains its power in and only in sexual consummation, and for him sexuality disrupts the power of amorous recognition by the female other. The rapturous, erotic love he fancies threatens to kill, and must itself be displaced, sacralized and fettered in verse. The consumptive appeal of heterosexual erotics thus is transposed into and by a series of tropes that recalls the twinned lovers of The good-morrow, but turns their expansiveness into a world-ingesting frenzy:

You whom reverend love
Made one anothers hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage,
Who did the whole worlds soule extract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize,
Countries, Townes, Courts ....

(39-44)

Even in their hermitage, the lovers show the traces of consumptive desire, of consumptive violence. The poet's ambivalent dream of erotic dying acquires here (in the imagined invocations of future acolytes) an appropriative fury—against the world, against the auditor, and perhaps against sexual love itself which separates the poet from the world he still looks to for validation. In his flight from the perplexities of sexual conjunction, the poet finds only the signifying tomb of a "well wrought urn," what Luce Irigaray might call a "narcissistic monument." The mystery of erotic love is contained for Donne in this tomb, in this death and transcription of sexual union.

In Donne's more cynical poems of misogynistic rancor and sexual revulsion, love is neither ideal nor mysterious. Nor is it an alluring way of acquiring recognition from the female other. Instead, love is sex and sex is deadening. In Farewell to Love, the very pleasure of intercourse institutes a form of rot: "Being had, enjoying it decayes" (16). In this necrotic afterglow, there is only lassitude and enervation and a lingering but phlegmatic
sense of loss: "it leaves behinde/ A kinde of sorrowing dulnesse of mind" (19-20). The problem, it seems, is that male sexuality involves an all too rapid and inevitable voidance: the masculine potency blazoned in erection quickly succumbs to flaccidity. The penis, in Donne's words, is "onely for a minute made to be/ Eager" (29-30). In response to this disquieting slackness, the poet renounces lovemaking and seeks to distance himself from the menace posed by sexual intimacy with women:

I'll no more dote and runne
To pursue things which had indammag'd me.
And when I come where moving beauties be,
As men doe when the summers Sunne
Growes great,
Though I admire there greatnesse, shun their heat;
Each place can afford shadowes. If all faile,
'Tis but applying worme-seed to the Taile.
(33-40)

The poet's bridling reticence towards women in this stanza involves and perpetuates a conventional masculine displacement. The poet comes to blame women for what he has already articulated as male inadequacy. In his final saucy repudiation of sexuality, women become not merely the site of male sexual fears, but their source. Consequently, objectification and projections of blame combine in the poet's distancing vocabulary. Initially, he conflates women with the sexual act that renders him spent and miserable, seeing both as "things" which have "indammag'd" him. He implies through this language that there is an adequate, potent masculinity that exists prior to lovemaking,
which is later withered by intercourse, by women, by sexual "things." In the next line, he continues his effort to distance himself from women, referring to them as "moving beauties." This mildly ambivalent phrasing emphasizes the poet's wish to limit women's value and effective power (their power to "move" men) to the register of visual aesthetics. The poet acknowledges that women's comeliness will continue to captivate him, but he believes that he can and will diminish the threat of that captivation by consciously "shun[ning] their heat." His desire is to abstain from any contact with women, sexual or otherwise (women's "heat" may signify not only sexual ardor, but bodily warmth--"life"--as well). By shunning their heat, he repudiates what makes women both threatening and alive, what makes them, in his eyes, capable of withering or drying up his tumescent but vulnerable masculine identity and authority. The poet thus reinforces the implication that women's carnal pull, unless bridled by male sexual renunciation, is the cause of male impoverishment, of a threatening voidance of sexual pretensions and self-engendered power.

In the poem's final, taunting couplet, however, the poet acknowledges that his strategy of sexual abstention may not succeed in eliminating the possibility (and implicitly the threat) of intercourse. He responds by trivializing the act itself, articulating it, for the man involved, as an exercise of subjectless instrumentality: "If all fail,/ 'Tis but applying worme-seede to the Taile." In this cynical "demystification" of
lovemaking, the poet extends his verbal distanciation from women, reducing them to a body part marked and demeaned as sexual. But through his pun on the term "taile," which may refer to his own genitals as well as women's, the poet intimates that his cavalier disdain towards intimacy with women remains coupled to a still simmering contempt for his own sexuality.¹³ The poet's earlier connections between detumescence and death, however, are not simply recapitulated in the final couplet. For now, surprisingly, it is phallic potency itself that must be disdained and controlled, which the poet assumes he can accomplish by applying an anaphrodisiac--"worme-seede"--to his penis.¹⁴ Rather than bemoaning the ephemeral qualities of male arousal and endurance as he had done previously, the poet comes to malign the erect and desiring penis itself. His tacit scorn towards this signifier of embodied male desire surfaces in the term "worme-seede" which suggests not only an anaphrodisiac, but also a plant used medicinally during Donne's time because of its supposedly anthelmintic properties (that is, it kills internal parasites--worms).¹⁵ To assert that an erection can be treated with wormseed intimates figuratively that erection itself is the result of a sort of parasitic infestation, an agitating effect of unwilled desires that implicitly parasitize the body and which the poet wishes to have the power to remedy. The disdain that the poet indicates towards his "taile," then, is a disdain for the implicit autonomy of the sexual realm, of its subtle but insistent subversion of the hegemony of masculine will. His jest about
wormseed thus appears as a sardonic attempt to master or exterminate this realm, suggesting a connection between sexual arousal, desire and parasitic infestation. By submitting sexuality to this distancing rhetoric of cynicism, the poet implies that sexual responsiveness can be controlled, both "medicinally" and verbally.

The poem's final couplet, then, can be read as a witty but troubled attempt to rehearse and institute distinctions which separate the male subject from sexuality, eroticized love and women. He objectifies and detaches himself from male potency by implying that desire itself as signified in erection is an effect of a parasitization which the male subject can and should "cure." Even though sexual arousal is an infestation, an incursion of "alien" influences, it may be easily remedied by the application of an anthelmintic. Women, too, are distanced, though not with the same pharmacological ease. For even in the poet's attempt to offset the potential intersubjective force of lovemaking by instrumentalizing it (suggesting that intercourse is merely a utilitarian application of semen to the "taille" of women), he acknowledges that the very contact he wishes to renounce may very well occur. He will, he assumes, eventually engage in what he depicts as the potentially debilitating act of love. However, by using the term "taille" as a stand-in for women, the poet attempts to negate the threat of lovemaking by foreclosing any possible blurring of self and other in sexual coupling. Not only are women reduced to a body part, the very
position of coition is subtly delimited. Through his depiction of
the sex act as a brief implemental contact with a "taile," the
poet cryptically frames intercourse as occurring from behind. In
this position, the male does not have to face his other, worry
about any potential struggle for recognition, or concern himself
with her desires. There is no longer a trace of the idealizing
symmetry or attunement that so often figures in Donne's poems
of mutual love. In a sense, he is subtly attempting to avoid the
entire ideation of sexual congress signified by the "missionary"
position with its connotations of mutuality and symmetry.17
Intercourse from the rear requires no intersubjective
engagement, no bodily mirroring, no exchange or reciprocation of
desires. It is, in the poet's trope, strictly an instrumental act.
Like the "Cock and Lyons" which "jocund be, / After such
pleasures" (22), the man can focus entirely on gratifying himself
physically, on sexuality as a purely physical act. And although
the poet cannot appropriate the carefree sexual enjoyment he
imagines in animals because he perceives a threat of death to
inhere in sexual desire, their more "bestial" positioning appeals
to him because it serves to reify gender differences and enforce
male-female distinctions even during the sexual act itself. Sex
with a "taile," sex from behind, involves no mystery, no
intermingling of opposites, no jubilant complementarity, no
pleasures of recognition. It conjures no fears of infidelity
because it entails no loving captivation, no intersubjective
desire. It involves only a man administering his seed to
women. The poet's conscious desire, then, the desire that he accepts as *his*, concentrates not on the female other but rather on rehearsing and sustaining a realm of masculine sexual intelligibility that eludes the imaginary relation the poet himself establishes between heterosexual coupling and death. In this farewell to amorous attunement, instrumental intelligibility and disdainful mastery become the cynically constituted substitutes for love, and recognition is reduced to the anxious, homosocial chortle of an imagined coterie audience.

III

The misogynistic gibe which ends *Farewell to Love* strives to foreclose the possibility of the masculine self being "indammag'd" by women and by intersubjective desires. By articulating and circumscribing sexuality within a polarized version of gender asymmetry (man as uninvolved instrument, above and behind; woman as "taile," as receptacle, unrecognized and below, reduced to a de-eroticized posterior), Donne's reticent coxcomb attempts to use cynical conventions of sexual difference to regiment amorous desire and to secure masculine autonomy against the potentially deadening power of sexual consummation. Male heterosexual desire and performance becomes the butt of a cynical humor whose appeal and pleasure requires a homosocial realm of male auditors for recognition. This homosocially constituted sexual order effectively precludes loving, reciprocal sexuality, for the positioning itself keeps the
man from establishing bonds of similarity with his sexual partner. Unable to see her face, he cannot attune to or mirror her desire, he cannot see her desire as mirroring his, nor do their bodily motions suggest a symmetry of desires. Instead, both man and woman are cloistered in asymmetries of gender presented as sexual differences through which the man assumes identity and power by negating both potentials in the woman he couples with and disdains. Sexual "complementarity" thus becomes in the poet’s farewell to love a mode of difference used to legitimate the poet’s misogynous affirmation of male power.

In *Farewell to Love*, then, the perpetuation of an "undamaged" masculine identity requires that love and sexuality be governed (and distanced) in ways that radicalize certain aspects of gender difference. Donne's roguish surrogate, through cynicism, renunciation and misogyny, seems bent on engendering a relational realm which disavows the possibility of intersubjective unison between the masculine subject and women, between his self and the female other. It is perhaps not surprising, given this connection between masculine identity and gender difference, that the Donne poem which most literally articulates the desire for symmetry, recognition and mirroring attunement in love deploys a lesbian as its mouthpiece. John Carey has noted that Donne's *Sapho to Philaenius* is "the first female homosexual love poem in English." As such, Elizabeth Harvey reasons, considering the general oppression of homosexual interests and desires in Western culture, Donne
risked "opprobrium and censorship" in producing it.21 Until recently, even Donne's academic readers have largely ignored the elegy, and many have questioned its authenticity in spite of its appearance in the 1633 edition of Donne's poems and in many manuscripts.22 James Holstun believes that the poem "has embarrassed many of [Donne's] admirers into defensiveness and silence."23 For Donne, however, the notion of assuming a lesbian voice would seem to have held a certain transgressive, witty appeal. More importantly, however, writing as Sapho allowed Donne to imagine an erotic relation issuing from similarity rather than opposition or complementarity, producing an alternative to the problematics of sexual consummation suggested in Farewell to Love (and The Canonization). Unlike a poem such as The Extasie which articulates a more Neoplatonic version of the possibility of intersubjective unison in love, imagining amorous contact as a metaphysical congress of souls, Sapho to Philaenis imagines and mourns a lost but rapturous confluence of love, erotic desire and recognition. Since masculine identity is not overtly at issue, Sapho, unlike the bridled coxcomb of Farewell to Love, can imagine and yearn to recover the imagined bliss of intersubjective symmetry.

The poem begins in the melancholy of lost love and recognition, but unlike The Canonization, poetry itself does not possess the power to restore or even to commemorate love satisfactorily. Poetry founders for Sapho both as a medium of seductive enchantment and as a memorial:
Where is that holy fire, which Verse is said
To have? is that enchanting force decaï’d?
Verse that draws Natures workes, from Natures law,
Thee, her best worke, to her worke cannot draw.

Onely thine image, in my heart, doth sit,
But that is waxe, and fires environ it.
My fires have driven, thine have drawn it hence;
And I am rob’d of Picture, Heart, and Sense.
Dwells with me still mine irksome Memory,
Which both to keepe, and lose, grieves equally.
(1-4, 9-14)

Sapho begins her epistle by lamenting that the "enchanting force" of poetry has lost its power. In Sapho’s realm of love and seduction, poetic articulation fails to assuage her loss of Philaenis because it can produce only certain imitations of "nature;" it lacks the magic to recover or reproduce the desired other, to generate presence from absence. Though verse can "draw" nature, that is, represent it, it cannot "draw" things together in simulation of the powers of eros; poetry cannot replace the gratifications of love or recognition. Consequently, poetic imitation becomes the shadowy double not of love itself but of an "irksome Memory." Sapho had desired, since verse could not restore her love, to at least memorialize her love with an image, a representation; but that very image, in the affective turmoil of grief, lost recognition and continuing desire, has no stability or permanence. In the fires of melancholic longing, all is melting, flowing, drawn off rather than drawn together.
Not all is lost, however, for there is still some remnant of love which remains in memory. But this memory puts Sapho in a double bind: since memory is insufficient to substitute for love, to preserve it serves as a perpetual reminder of the absence of her lover; but since the relics of memory are all that remain of the lover, to lose those relics is to lose the final vestiges of the lover herself. Sapho thus imagines herself as caught in an inexorable structure of grief, a grief that seems beyond the recuperative power of poetic mourning. But Sapho's intent in the poem is not simply to reiterate her grief. She also wishes, through her verse, to recover her love, to seduce Philaenitis again. Sapho's discourse holds out to Philaenitis an ideal of love which can only be enjoyed in the perfect symmetry of a lesbian relationship. Love is, for Sapho, an amorous identification with the other unmarred by sexual difference.

The notion of symmetry is so powerful for Sapho that it serves as the major element in her flattery of Philaenitis:

Thou art not soft, and cleare, and strait, and faire,  
As Down, as Stars, Cedars, and Lillies are,  
But thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only  
Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye.  
(21-24)

Philaenitis is incomparable not because she exceeds or matches the treasures of nature, but because she matches and reflects herself and only herself. For Sapho, such incomparable bilateral symmetry, such self-identity, implicitly belongs only to women.
Men may possess it when young, but eventually change: "Such was my Phao 'awhile, but shall be never, / As thou, wast, art, and oh, maist be ever" (25-26). Unlike the female body, Sapho sees the male body as altering from itself while it sexually matures. And this change, in Sapho's eyes, disrupts the ability of males to conform to her ideal of beauty and love. She uses this "flaw" to denigrate any male lovers Philaenis may have:

Plaies some soft boy with thee, oh there wants yet
   A mutuall feeling which should sweeten it.
His chinne, a thorny hairy'unevennesse
   Doth threaten, and some daily change possesse.
(31-34)

Men, because of their beard, a "secondary" sexual characteristic, are daily marked by change, by difference.24 This perpetual mutability of the post-pubescent male relates, in Sapho's mind, to her assertion that men, or "soft boys," lack the ability to establish "a mutuall feeling" with women. Since they are not symmetrical with themselves over time, since men differ from their pre-pubescent, symmetrical selves, they cannot provide the sharing of sentiment that "sweetens" lesbian love.

Because of the gendered characteristics attributed to them by Sapho, then, men sully the dream of symmetry that she uses to entreat Philaenis. Sexual relations with men, rather than producing a captivating sense of mutual likeness, impregnate women with a violating intrusion of difference:

   Thy body is a naturall Paradise,
In whose selfe, unmanur'ed, all pleasure lies,
Nor needs perfection; why shouldst thou than
Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
Men leave behind them that which their sin showes,
And are as theeeves trac'd, which rob when it snowes.

(35-40)

Donne, ventriloquizing Sapho,\textsuperscript{25} gives voice to the taint and implicit violence that male sexual performance may have on women and to its disruption of the symmetry of loving engagement. Here, with Sapho as a screen, the problems that male sexuality poses to idealized love, problems which appear in more cynical or cryptic form in some of Donne's other poems, acquire trenchant voice. Sapho assumes and celebrates the perfection of the female body, and implicitly rejects any notion or belief that heterosexual congress is necessary because each gender, particularly the female, is incomplete, lacking, and therefore requires the sexual investment of the other for fulfillment.\textsuperscript{26} In her view, what women acquire from men during intercourse is not a supplemental complementarity which leads to perfection, but rather the spoor of male desire which corrupts or violates that perfection. Sapho's critique of male sexuality recognizes and denounces the aggression embodied in the final couplet of *Farewell to love*. Her critique also echoes Donne's preoccupation in that poem with the problems of male phallic voidance (the imagined annihilation of phallic power and authority during and in the aftermath of sexual climax). For Sapho, intercourse is a "tillage" that produces a "manuring."
Interested only in the pleasures of symmetry, she depicts procreation as a process that blurs the distinction between excrement and semen, between defecation and fertilization. Heterosexual joining, as framed by Sapho, is doubly invasive; it not only penetrates the woman's body, but it leaves behind man's vile, tainted, sexual substance ("that which their sin showes") which eventually can produce change in women--pregnancy and children.

Sapho's version of lesbian love, in contrast, produces no such signs of change which would violate either the self-identity of the female lovers, or their ideal symmetry: "But of our dallyance no more signes there are,/ Then fishes leave in streames, or Birds in air" (40-41). Instead, in Sapho's seductive dream of symmetry, such love becomes an erotic recognition of perfect likeness, a likeness in which the connection between narcissistic desire and love becomes explicit and in which the function of mirroring in love is literalized:

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,  
   But so, as thine from one another doe;  
And, oh, no more; the likenesse being such,  
   Why should they not alike in all parts touch?  
Hand to strange hand, lippe to lippe none denies;  
   Why should they brest to brest, or thighs to thighs?  
Likeness begets such strange selfe flatterie,  
   That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee.  
My selfe I'brace, and mine owne hands I kisse,  
   And amorously thanke my selfe for this.  
Me, in my glasse, I call thee, But alas,  
   When I would kisse, teares dimme mineeyes and glasse.
Sapho imagines and sees in Philaenis a perfect double whose self-symmetry mirrors but does not surpass Sapho's likeness to her. Self-identity and symmetry with a beloved other, for Sapho, are no different within this ideal of love. Through Philaenis, Sapho loves herself in her love for another. Love of self finds its perfect counterpart, and love of self and love of the other become the same. This articulation of rapture with the mirroring likeness of an other recalls Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage, and the pre-oedipal pleasures of attunement and similarity. According to Lacan, the pleasures of the mirror result from the child's desire to master its non-unified body. In the other, the specular double, the child sees and is "captured" by an enthralling image of wholeness, one it appropriates jubilantly for itself. But for Sapho, the pleasures of intersubjective symmetry are slightly different. Sapho does not desire to appropriate the other's image even though she rejoices that she simulates it, and thus does not follow the Lacanian track towards rivalry and the melancholic divestments and heterosexual identifications connected with the oedipus. Rather, she wishes to constitute a relation with the other steeped in the erotic jubilation of an exchange of recognition. In lesbianism, Sapho imagines a love in which the bliss of primal symmetry eludes the shattering produced by the aggression of
specular appropriation or the repression associated with paternal law.²⁹

Sapho's desire, however, remains unfulfilled for the duration of the poem; for what Sapho wishes to restore—the interanimation of twinned, symmetrically desiring subjects—depends on the will, the alienated desire of Philaenis. This alien desire stems from the intrusion of masculine alterity and mutability ("some soft boy") into the realm of symmetrical lesbian attachment. The idealized love of the other, which is no different than a love of self (that does not mean, however, that it is the Same as the love of self), finds itself broached by difference. This intrusion, however, is not essential or absolute; it is not a law in the Lacanian sense. For what has been lost in the loss or alienation of Philaenis—twinned, symmetrical desire, the bliss of an idealized erotic exchange of recognition—can potentially be restored if Philaenis allows herself to be seduced by Sapho's verse. She could then rejoin Sapho in the rapture of an intersubjective love based on a perfect symmetry. Sapho's desire can be fulfilled if Philaenis will conform her otherness to it.

Donne, however, through Sapho, ironizes this dream of symmetry, blunting its seductive power by having Sapho's love slide into the stigmatized realm of female narcissism.³⁰ Sapho's dream to love the self in the other and the other as an affirming validator of the self is reduced to erotic captivation with the self in a mirror. In a parodic movement of sublation, Sapho's
desire for a homologous but separate other, a binary, intersubjective desire, becomes its monadic simulation--auto-affection, narcissism, non-genitalized masturbation: "Likeness begets such strange selfe flatterie,/ That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee."

Elizabeth Harvey denounces the poem for having Sapho produce a lesbian realm which is "narcissistically sterile." In the poem, she asserts, Donne takes the otherness of lesbian desire and appropriates it, "a process that is mediated by ventriloquism and voyeurism." The poem, according to this reading, manifests a double act of masculine power: Donne lodges his voice in a malleable "female" persona and lustily gazes at the resulting imaginary (self-pleasuring) body. But what Harvey does not acknowledge in her analysis is that the poem does not issue solely from fantasies of masculine control and authority; it also involves a certain submission and vulnerability on the part of the masculine subject "ventriloquizing" the poem. Sapho as a persona provides Donne with the possibility of an identificatory masquerade through which he can imagine, submit to and simultaneously disavow a desired inversion of certain conventional aspects of masculine sexuality. As a poet, as a male, Donne, perhaps, only allows himself the cynical pleasure of a derisive voyeurism, engaging with Sapho and her slide into auto-eroticism only through the distancing mediatian of Sapho as a mask for a prurient male gaze. But as Sapho, as a woman, even as a verbal transvestite, he imagines the pleasures of a
symmetrical, censored mode of intersubjective attunement and
love which is reducible neither to narcissism nor to colonization,
and which voices the melancholy of its loss. Through Sapho,
Donne can assume a distance from the identifications of love
while remaining resolutely attached to a fantasy of erotic
pleasure unmarred by the vulnerabilities and voidances of male
sexual desire and performance.

Donne's ambivalence towards Sapho's narcissism manifests
itself in his unwillingness to leave her transfixed in the erotic
closure of the mirror. Almost as soon as she begins to caress
herself, evoking the stigma of a shaming narcissism, she begins
to weep, signifying her apprehension of the profound difference
between the symmetry of love and the symmetry of the mirror.
Sapho can, through the mirror, literalyze and enact her desire for
herself; but such love immediately reveals itself to her as
insufficient, a frenzied, flat simulation. In this moment of
simulated recognition (I am the other in the other's absence; I am
the shadow where the other was; I am attuned only to myself),
Sapho implores Philaenis to restore to her the symmetry that
completes her being: "O cure this loving madness, and restore/
Me to mee; thee, my halfe, my all, my more " (57-58). For Sapho,
the jubilation of symmetrical love could convert the
insufficiency and isolation of narcississtic desires into an
ontological excess. In the fantasized twinning of lesbian love,
being, recognition and pleasure potentially exist in abundance;
love, for Sapho, is not far from ecstasy. But it is also not far
from abjection. For Sapho's dream depends on the autonomy of Philaenis, on Philaenis' capacity to differ from and reject Sapho. Unlike men, who differ from women by their "thorny, hairy'unevennesses," Philaenis varies from Sapho only in the mutable singularity of her desire, a desire which always has the potential to abandon or discard Sapho. But if Sapho can succeed in seducing Philaenis, she can overcome this threat of rejection and find an attuned other in whom desire institutes neither separation nor rivalry, in whom desire is not the remnant of a constituting phallic lack. In Sapho, Donne can love erotically without a penis. Consequently, Sapho's dream of loving symmetry and its evocation of lost, intersubjective attunement emerge in an imaginary realm that does not know the anxieties of phallic vulnerability or voidance. For Donne, masquerading as Sapho allows him to imagine and represent the pleasures and grief that surround his desiring, stigmatized evocation of erotic bliss.

IV

In Sapho to Philaenis, Donne's dream of loving attunement with another involves erotic as well as mimetic pleasures. Through the lesbianization of his desire, Donne allows sexuality its place in the deep, intersubjective symmetry that underlies and shapes his poetics of love. Sapho's longing for Philaenis does not sacrifice the erotic (though it does sacrifice the phallus), nor does it desexualize love in order to replicate a masculine ideal of
specular attraction. Instead, Sapho's desire for recognition is explicitly sensual and sexual and emerges only from similarities between the self and other, not from gendered difference or improvisations of power. She longs to establish a twinning of desires with Philaenis through the perfect (and imaginary) symmetry of their bodies and the mutual rejection of the "thorny hairy'unevenesse" (33) caused by the male possession of the phallus. She longs, in a sense, for a mode of recognition which has as its goal perfect erotic attunement, perfect unison unsullied by the the change, difference, violence and symbolic power imposed by the intrusion of the phallus.

In Donne's most exemplary poem of symmetrical love, *The Extasie*, the sustaining ideal of love is quite similar to that of *Sapho to Philaenis*. In both poems, desire itches for intersubjective likeness and attunement. As with Sapho (but without the distancing screen of lesbianism), the poetic narrator of *The Extasie* imagines love as involving a perfect homology of desire between self and other. Recognition of and by the other occurs, at least initially, only through a transcendent perception of similarity. The self and other engage in mutual recognition because each, at the level of soul, shares the same interior language and desire. As with Sapho, however, such recognition seems to demand the absence of sexual difference. But because this love, unlike Sapho's, is heterosexual, that is, because it occurs in a milieu in which the presence of the phallus is presumed, the desire for similarity and recognition as imagined
in *The Extasie* involves a transformation of each subject. They must become, at least for a time, disembodied. For it is only by representing both self and other as sexless, unbodied souls that the poet's dream of ungendered, intersubjective symmetry can momentarily transcend the troubles and perplexities that Donne connects with heterosexual desire:

This Extasie doth unperplex  
(We said) and tell us what we love,  
Wee see by this, it was not sexe,  
Wee see, we saw not what did move:

But as all severall soules containe  
Mixture of things, they know not what,  
Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,  
And makes both one, each this and that.  
(29-36)

According to the poet, the lovers were initially confused in their erotic attraction to each other—they did not see (or know) the "proper" object of their desire. Although they thought that they were drawn together by "sexe," in their "extasie" they learn otherwise. The captivation that binds the lovers together does not and did not stem from the erotic coupling of male and female, from heterosexual desire; rather, it issues from the twinning of two ungendered souls to produce an idealized unity. Each soul, in the alembic of disembodied love, mixes and shares with its other to produce a desired, asexual convergence. And from this change comes a compensatory synthesis:

When love, with one another so
Interanimates two soules,
That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
Defects of lonelinesse controules.
(41-44)

In the rapture of sexless love, two souls can mix and supplement in such a way that they join in a new identity--they coalesce into one "abler soule." Without the perplexities of bodies or genders, souls not only can reflect each other, they can become each other; they can sublate binary difference. This synthesis of being, an immaculate double of Sapho's eroticized (and stigmatized) auto-affection, controls the "defects of lonelinesse" which apparently inhere within all souls that have not "interanimated" with a perfectly homologous other. As in Plato's Symposium, where Aristophanes uses the myth of the androgynes to suggest that love is always a captivation with the Same (the other myself), the souls here love each other because they are fundamentally alike--"both meant, both spake the same" (26).35 The melancholy of ontological deficit, of solitude, which is a function of individuality, of embodiment, of difference, can be managed, according to the poet, by this wondrous sense of identity. Refined by love, the poet imagines himself and his lover as souls who, having shed materiality, "no change can invade" (48). Unlike heterosexual coupling, which for Donne inevitably involves a man in the vicissitudes of phallic performance and impermanence and consequently in a simulation of death, The Extasie's desexualized "entergrafting" of self and other imagines
love without the perplexities of consummation, a love in which
the phallus and gender vanish in a stable ecstasy of homologous
souls.

But as the poet himself eventually recognizes, this rapture is
itself deficient—a seductive illusion. As the poet plaintively
reminds his lover, soul-love is in itself lacking: "But O alas, so
long, so farre/ Our Bodies why do we forbeare?" (49-50). Desire,
even the subliming desire of platonic ecstasy, longs for a return
to materiality:

So must pure lovers soules descend
T'afflections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great Prince in prison lies.

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules do grow,
But yet the body is his booke.

(61-68)

For Donne's speaker, love requires bodies, but not simply to
recover sexuality, as one might expect. Rather love requires
corporeality in order that it be legible, that it signify, that it
might become socially intelligible. For in spite of the perfect,
ecstatic symmetry of the souls of the lovers, they apparently
receive no freedom and perhaps no pleasure from a love that must
remain cloistered in disembodied mystery, lacking sensory
mediation and voice. Though the lovers' possess the ability to
interanimate in "soules language" (22), such a means of coupling
proves overly hermetic. For even the hypothetical auditor whom Donne imagines overhearing them cannot understand the lovers unless he or she has "grown all minde" (23) through the refining powers of love. Cleansed of materiality by such a subliming metamorphosis, the auditor "Might thence a new concoction take" (26, my emphasis). Yet even with such purification, the auditor still might not be able to comprehend or recognize the miraculous achievement of the lovers. Consequently, in order to secure recognition—from each other, from observers—the couple must return to "affections, and to faculties" where their love can be witnessed and reflected, where it can solicit the identificatory affirmation of others. As in The Canonization, the poet wishes to textualize his love in order to present it as a seductive paradigm for his imaginary audience. But here bodies rather than explicitly verbal forms serve as the "books" which signify the poet's desire to be seen, recognized, imitated, reflected.36

The poet's desired return to bodies at the end of the poem thus can be seen as a repetition of the fantasy which initiated the ecstasy itself, the fantasy of being reflected and recognized by the other's gaze. Rapture, for the poet, had begun in an "enter grafting" of hands and a mesmerizing linkage of congruent gazes: "Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred/ Our eyes, upon one double string/ . . . . /And pictures in our eyes to get/ Was all our propagation" (7-8, 11-12). In this fantasy, the entrenchment of love results from the appearance of the other as totally
attuned to and mirroring the desire of the self. The poet and his lover, even though still embodied, marvel at their mutual reflection in the other. Singular bodies figuratively compact into eyes, which themselves become twinned frames for specular reproductions of the self. Gender disappears as the propagation of images and its pleasures displace the bearing of children as the goal of heterosexual coupling\(^37\) and similarity rather than hierarchy engenders recognition. This desexualization of love implicitly continues even after the lovers return to bodies. According to the poet, the bodies function only as essentially discardable intermediaries leading souls into the ecstasy of merger: "Soe soule into the soule may flow,\(\) Though it to body first repair" (59-60). Even in bodies, love stems from and is moved by an imaginary enthrallment with the other's similarity and attunement. The body-text that manifests "loves mysteries" thus enacts a continual flow of signifier to signified, attempting to slough off corporeality in its desire to articulate a relational realm without difference; sexual coupling, if it occurs, dissolves into the liquidity of this realm where love is primarily the convergence of self and other, the mirroring interanimation of like by like. The descent to bodies, then, is not much different than the "extasie" itself. The poet himself states that a third party who had heard the lovers' soul-language "shall see/ Small change, when we're to bodies gone" (75-76). The symmetry of bodies is different than the symmetry of souls, but according to the poet, the difference is negligible.
What is important, however, about the descent into bodies is that it allows the poet's dream of perfect symmetry "public" significance. In a strange paradox, ecstatic symmetry, the purported ideal of the poem, does not satisfy unless it can produce (or seduce) other, less ideal symmetries--specifically homosocial ones. It has been said by Eve Sedgwick that men engender their similarity over the body of woman; in *The Extasie*, however, the poet and his imaginary auditor (a surrogate for Donne's readers) find their likeness in the erasure of the gendered, autonomous body of a woman. Unlike Sapho, who desires Philaenis as a mirroring other, both symmetrical and different, the poet here minimizes any difference between his lover and himself. Even when figures of conflict appear in the poem, Donne carefully limits any suggestion of fundamental difference. When the souls first leave their bodies, he likens their desiring advance to "two equal armies" (13). In the next stanza, continuing the military metaphor, the souls "negotiate," suggesting some measure of difference. But the poet immediately emphasizes the entranced symmetry of the lovers' bodies as if to contain this implication: "Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;/ All day, the same our postures were,/ And wee said nothing, all the day" (14-16). Two stanzas later, the poet reveals that the "negotiation" actually contained no elements of difference, since the negotiators' discourse was perfectly symmetrical, even identical--"both meant, both spake the same." This obliteraton of difference between the lovers, however,
seems to produce in the poet a desire to engage other possibilities of difference—first in the return to bodies, but more pointedly in the desire to use the textualization of his love to solicit recognition from an imaginary witness (and from readers).

The dream of loving the Same which pervades the poem thus appears to be haunted by its promiscuous double, a longing for otherness, for others who still need to be, in some sense, seduced. The poet’s lover, having vanished into the invisibility of perfect symmetry, must be supplemented as a source of recognition by others whose desire can be construed as differing from the poet’s. These others, suggested in the poem by the imaginary auditor, have no explicit gender. They, like the lovers themselves, must become "disembodied" to witness ecstatic love; and, through an attunement of their desire to the poet’s, they must come to reflect the lovers themselves, becoming, in the poet’s words, "such as wee" (71). This need to solicit others to validate the symmetries of love marks a significant change from the way love is imagined by Sapho. For her, verse is a vehicle to mourn the loss of Philaenis’ love, and to try to seduce it again. But Sapho’s love, if recuperated, has at least the potential for sufficiency. In The Extasie, however, symmetrical love requires, even in its imaginary perfection, supplementation and reduplication; it is never sufficient. Bodies need to render it legible and auditors need to grant it significance and recognition. The poet’s "dialogue of one," then, even as it attempts to absorb
sexual difference into the mysteries of loving symmetry, cannot render a mode of heterosexual coupling which is satisfactory for the male poet. In the poet's need for an audience (implicitly an ungendered, idealized audience which can recognize and validate the poet), the homosocial rivals the heterosexual as the final arbiter of love's pleasures and value, and the intimate sphere of the lovers' mutual captivation must submit itself to an implicitly social gaze. There is no final epiphany of fulfillment; the poet's dream of heterosexual symmetry can only partially gratify his desire for recognition. Donne, even while imagining the pleasures of loving symmetry, retains the need for a differing other.

V

Frank Kermode has written that "Donne openly despises the ritual and indirection of Platonic love; he will follow Nature and pluck his rose (or roses; for Love's sweetest part is variety)." But Donne's desire for consummation is as much mimetic as sexual or consumptive. He is driven to women not simply by lust however conceived but rather by a dream of symmetry and mutual attunement which works to mitigate his problems with female autonomy and possibilities of phallic voidance. His sexual desire, at least the one he finds the least troubling, imagines him in a relation of ungendered, interanimating love with an auditor to recognize the value of such attunement. Donne's desire to
have submits to a desire to be like, and to have others be like him. His wish, it seems, is to imagine the pleasures of a promiscuous process of recognition, one in which the symmetry and recognition of mutual lovers induces a desire for similarity in his imaginary audience. Donne's repetitive dream of reciprocal love and his articulation of it in his poetry record a profound desire for recognition, one which imagines an unending desire to imitate and to be imitated. This dream, however, has its costs, and the pleasures of erotic love are implicitly (and ambiguously) one of them. In his quest to see the other as a mirror of recognition, Donne displaces the phallus with the speculum as a means of structuring his relations to the other. There is a death, then, in his fantasies of symmetrical love, a death of the phallus; but it is an active death, one which requires that the lover return from the contracted sphere of self and other to the social realm, and seduce it.

For Donne, then, the dream of symmetrical love, however captivating, is neither adequate in itself nor simple. It remains, in all its appearances in Donne's poetry, suspicious but ambivalent towards heterosexual eroticism and the multiple constructions of power and authority that permeate it. It also remains aware of its own insufficiency, implicitly understanding that the desire for recognition that underlies it can be fulfilled only by a partial displacement of the dream itself--into verse, into lesbianism, into the predominantly homosocial wish to seduce an audience. Finally, it is a dream of an active death, one
in which the phallus must die that the phoenix may rise and be recognized in the captivated and captivating gaze of others.


3This denial entails a sublimatory displacement with sexual consummation iconically mimed by the "bracelet of bright hair around the bone" (6). The lovers, in death, "enjoy" the coupling that they "miraculously" ignored in life.


5John Shawcross suggests that the eagle and dove allude to "the debate between the two daughters of God, righteousness and mercy, [which] in medieval literature, produced Peace" (The Complete Poetry of John Donne, Garden City: New York, Anchor Books, 1967, p. 401). This seems a symptomatic and farfetched attempt to reduce the conflict in the lines. One could just as easily see the figures as alluding to Christ and the Holy Spirit.
6In *Loves Deitie*, the mythical role of love in reconciling active and passive, male and female, surfaces explicitly: "But when an even flame two hearts did touch,/ His office was indulgently to fit/ Actives to passives" (10-12).


8It is unclear whether the acolyte uses "now" to refer to worldly love in his era or rather to a transformation of the love of the poet. But given the violent appropriation of the world in the following lines, the poet's love, even in imaginary sainthood, seems rife with fury.

9Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1947, p. 105. To support his conclusion, Brooks dismisses the fly and taper tropes as instances of "the infinite fund of absurdities which can be applied to lovers" in order to focus on the figure of the phoenix which he considers "fully serious" (103). He needs to focus on the phoenix because it provides a touchstone for his desire to see in lyric poetry the sacred union effected in the evocation of paradox (see 106). Needless to say, one can read the poem differently.

10Marotti, 158. Marotti's sense of an "identity" between the auditor and Donne's coterie is symptomatic of his often too seamless linkage between history, biography and the poetry. From this linkage comes his problematic sense that the poetry is a form of aestheticized psychotherapy. He tellingly states that *The Canonization* is "a gesture of wit that psychologically relieved [Donne's] pain" (165). Given the ambivalence towards poetry as a form of psychic balm which Donne himself toys with in *The triple Foole*, Marotti's "knowledge" of Donne's psyche seems suspect.
11 Marotti, 163.

12 Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill, Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1984, p. 54. For Irigaray, the construction of such a monument involves a desexualization of desire, allowing the male subject a sublimatory detour on the libidinal track to death.

13 Christopher Ricks sees the "poem's ending . . . [as] an act of revulsion" which manifests a "repudiation of the poem's own deepest apprehendings" ("Donne After Love," in Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons, ed., Elaine Scarry, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1988, p. 34). I would argue again, however, as I did in an earlier footnote (chapter 2, note 65) that this act of revulsion is itself one of the poem's deepest apprehendings, particularly regarding the troubling construction of certain modes of masculine subjectivity. Ricks' problem in his essay is his assumption that the poem's "final repudiatory bitterness" manifests a "shallowness" (35) which the critic should repudiate in a gesture that mimics Donne's efforts to distance himself from those sticky, sexual realms which he finds troubling. As Ricks himself eventually admits, his chief concern is not with the misogyny that frequently surfaces in Donne's poems: "it isn't so much that Donne is a cad to women . . . . but that he is corrosively unfaithful to his poems" (64). To see Donne's misogyny as predominantly an aesthetic problem is an act of displacement which suggests Ricks own unease about the realm of "postcoital sadness and revulsion" (33) which is the ostensible focus of his essay.

14 Both Shawcross (The Complete Poetry of John Donne, p. 152) and Smith (John Donne: the Complete English Poems, p. 375) provide this gloss.

16In this regard, it is not surprising that the term "taile" simultaneously signifies both the penis and women. This attempt to mark all sexuality as "female" responds to a common patriarchal urge to frame maleness as reasoning, willing and as disembodied as possible and to imagine femaleness as bodily, sexed and tied to fertility.

17The implicit rejection of symmetrical positioning during coitus resonates with Helen Carr's suggestion that the "contradiction at the heart of [early modern] bourgeois marriage is constantly at play in [Donne's] writings" ("Donne's Masculine Persuasive Force," p. 109). This contradiction exists in the tension between a tendency, influenced by the Puritans, to affirm equality in marriage while retaining and even augmenting masculine dominance in both the marital and business realms. Donne's sodomistic fantasy cynically attempts to reify masculine dominance and identity in sexual positioning.

18Judith Butler, in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York: Routledge, 1990, argues that the desire to consolidate gender into two distinct and separate types of sexed bodies founds itself on the social organization of reproduction (110). Donne's reduction of amorous contact to an instrumentalized administration of "seed" follows this desire to reify gender differences, and to use those constructed differences to buttress the fragile persistence and coherence of his masculine identity.

19I do not wish to suggest here any general devaluing of one sexual position as opposed to another. My interest is only to suggest the possible implications of the "rear" position in relation to the poem's efforts to renounce love and disdain sexuality.

Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho: Ovid, Donne and the Erotics of the Feminine Voice," *Criticism*, 31 (1989) 115-138, p. 117. Harvey's declaration that the poem constitutes an "act of colonization" of the lesbian voice, however, seems exaggerated, for it assumes a radical separation between the imaginary construction of sexuality and desire and the appearance and operation of that construction in a discrete, reified "subject" (126). In other words, she assumes that Donne could not have lesbian desires which did not issue from the male desire to appropriate women and their voices. Harvey asserts that in the poem otherness is "domesticated and re-shaped into an image of the self, a process that is mediated both by ventriloquism and voyeurism" (126). I would only like to add that in the poem Donne also opens himself to a radical possibility of otherness, that his paradigmatic other--Woman-- is the same, that he is she and she is he, and that masculinity, in consequence, cannot be construed apart from woman as a domain of otherness *interior* to masculinity.

See Harvey, 116. The most notable recent questioner of the poem's "authenticity" is Gardner who in her edition of the "love" poetry strongly argues that the poem should not be attributed to Donne "on internal evidence" (*Elegies*, xlvi). Her basic reason is that she "find[s] it difficult to imagine him wishing to assume the love-sickness of Lesbian Sappho" (xlvi). Arthur Marotti agrees with Gardner that the poem should be listed as *dubia* without offering any reasons other than Gardner's (18, 305). Harvey argues that such arguments for the poem's inauthenticity are really attempts to censor and censure its subject matter (116).

24 Holstun makes this point (841).

25 The phrasing is Harvey's.

26 In Plato's *Symposium* (189D-193C), Aristophanes recounts a myth of an originary doubleness of human being (two heads, four arms, four legs, two sets of genitals, etc.) which is split by the Gods into two distinct beings. Love stems from the desire of individual beings to return to that originary wholeness of binary existence. Because Plato accepted homosexuality, Aristophanes' myth allows both heterosexual and homosexual love to issue from this originary wholeness (*Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, New York: Mentor, 1956, p. 86-89).

Love thus stems from a lack in individuated being, a notion which proves influential throughout the history of the concept of love. Jerome Schwartz notes that Aristophanes' myth was particularly important for Renaissance Neoplatonists who articulate through the concept of androgyny "a dreamlike idealism in which sexuality is the means of achieving some transcendent state of mystical union with the Godhead" ("Aspects of Androgyny in the Renaissance," in *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, Pittsburg: U. Pittsburg Press, 1978, p. 123). For Donne, however, mystical union is something different.


Holstun deplores Sapho's version of love as hopelessly regressive, defining it as "an impossible attempt to regain a primal state," a state in which, according to Holstun, Philaenis "inhabits a realm of preverbal monstrosity." Holstun reacts uneasily to Donne's affiliation of female homosexuality with an erotics he views as "regressive" (841).

See, for example, Abraham Cowley's use of female narcissism as the alternative to "true love" in his poem "Platonic Love."

Can that for true love pass
When a fair woman courts her glass?
Something unlike must in love's likeness be,
His wonder is one and variety,
For he whose soul nought but a soul can move,
    Does a new Narcissus prove,
And his own image love.

(15-21)


Harvey, p. 131.

Harvey, p. 126.

I would argue that Donne's appearance as Sapho breaks down the distinction between masquerade and transvestitism. His verbal "cross-dressing" is both an intentional manipulation of appearances and an unconscious act of libidinal investment.

Or the phallus. Holstun has written in relation to the poem that "proper reflection for Donne is platonic and hierarchical, not lesbian and symmetrical" (844), attempting to vest the poem with a "phallic" ideological structure by ruling
that power and hierarchy are pandemic in Donne's poetry. I do not think, however, that Sapho-Donne will wear such a "phallic" codpiece.

Aristophanes' myth of the origin of love is again relevant here. He states that all humanity was originally born double, some doubly male, some doubly female, and some a combination of both. This latter group of androgynes, because of their ambition (due to their completeness?), attacked the gods, who resisted their onslaught by splitting all of the groups in two. Love results from the desire of these split beings to recover their original unity: "this was our ancient natural shape, when we were both whole; and so the desire for the whole and the pursuit of it is named Love" (Great Dialogues of Plato, p. 88). Aristophanes also notes that "no one could suppose that this is a sensual union" (88). It is interesting to note that the most virtuous form of such love for Aristophanes is masculine and homosocial (and homosexual), the ideal manifestation, in a patriarchal culture, of the desire for the Same.

Elaine Scarry interprets Donne's interest in "inlaying" bodies with language as a manifestation of his "volitional materialism" ("John Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke,'" in Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons, ed. Elaine Scarry, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1988, p. 71). Scarry notes that Donne's "animus" against disease is a result of his attachment to a bodily volition that the foreign agency manifest in illness disrupts (73). I would add that sexuality also disrupts Donne's imaginings of a "volitional body" (and mind), and consequently is either distanced, displaced or disembodied by a language which at times separates erotics from the "book" of the body.

Janel Meuller suggests that in the poem Donne reframes gender away from its patriarchally delineated, "biological" underpinnings since he makes no use of the


40I think that Marotti's contention that these auditors are largely male has some validity, though I think that this notion is really accurate only for the Inns of Court poems. The verse epistles certainly indicate that women eventually constituted a significant audience for at least some of Donne's work.
Woman's Autonomy and the
Ambivalence of the Mirror

Recognition, for Donne, in its most desired form, arises from a very specifically imagined way of being with the female other. It involves an extraordinary experience of intersubjective unison, a dramatic perception of attunement and mirroring. Within this fantasy of relatedness, the woman, though other, constitutes the normally masculine, authorial self as both the subject and paradigm of her desires. Through the alchemy of love, her desire is his, and his is hers. But as several of Donne's poems disclose, there is a basic tension inherent in this dream of loving symmetry. This tension stems from the fact that the desire for recognition is fundamentally, as Jessica Benjamin has argued, an inter-subjective desire.¹ The self does not wish to be recognized either mechanically by an inert puppet or by a cipher; rather, it longs to be recognized by another subject. For Donne, this means that the female other must at least have the potential for autonomy. Consequently, in addition to her capacity to mirror or assume his amorous desires, she must possess the ability to challenge, resist, differ from or negate them. She also must possess, at least potentially, the ability to resist or transform the symbolic violence that frequently haunts Donne's assertions of desire.
In Donne's poems of accomplished love, woman's capacity for subversive autonomy is largely contained by the poet's dream of symmetry and his ability to see each imaginary woman who captivates him as voluntarily conforming to this dream. She reflects his desire because she accepts it as hers. But as several of Donne's more agitated or discontented poems of love disclose, when women's potential for autonomy is not contained in this way (or engaged seductively), it disrupts the entire dynamics of mirroring and intersubjective attunement. Because the female other can resist, differ or deviate from the projections of male desire, Donne's poet-figures often cannot assure themselves of the recognition that they so ardently seek. Their longing for recognition, they find to their chagrin, is subject to the other's desire. And this leads them to imagine a contentious, often ambivalent relation with the women who interest them, one in which possibilities of recognition and mirroring fray against fantasies and projections of women's recalcitrance, indifference or promiscuity. For Donne, women's autonomy is something to be both desired and feared, and it is this discord that produces the strains of anger and misogyny that frequently echo in his poetry.

The tensions that haunt Donne's desire for recognition surface explicitly in A Valediction of my name, in a window, a poem which imagines both a dream of symmetry and its possible annihilation at the hands of the female other. Throughout the poem's first seven stanzas, Donne's poet has been striving to establish his name which he has scratched in his lover's window
as a sort of transitional object that would mediate the loss threatened by his impending departure and ensure her ongoing recognition of him. He hopes that the name will create an illusion of his continuing presence which will endure after he and his lover separate. His "ragged bony name" (23) should, for his lover, assume the place of the poet's "ruinous Anatomy" (24), preserving and perpetuating a skeletal version of the self for her eyes. As the poet himself realizes, however, his engraved name is not simply a sign of continuing presence or a verbal mediator of recognition, but also a reminder of the ongoingness of loss:

So since this name was cut
When love and griefe their exaltation had,
No doore 'gainst this names influence shut,
As much more loving, as more sad,
'Twill make thee; and thou should'st, till I returne,
Since I die daily, daily mourne.

(37-42)

The name thus comes to assume a double function: it represents a dream of continuing recognition and attunement yet also functions as a memorialization of privation. As an index of loss within this fantasy of compensatory representation, the engraved name provides the poet with an amulet mediating separation, perpetually commemorating him as a lost (dead) object for his lover to recognize and remember. The act of signing his name (a synecdochal condensation of the act of writing itself) thus becomes a melancholic means to preserve the orientation of his lover's desire. According to this schema, separation need not
augur or engender annihilation, for as the poet has already suggested, his name establishes a verbal displacement of loss which resists the effects of the real: "As no one point, nor dash,/ . . . . / The showers and tempests can outwash,/ So shall all times find mee the same" (13, 15-16).

Immediately after depicting the name as a sort of fetish, however, the poet suddenly abandons his effort to use it to mediate his and his lover's anticipated parting. Instead, he abruptly imagines his lover not as rapt with grief, but as fervently promiscuous:

When thy'inconsiderate hand
Flings ope this casement, with my trembling name,
To looke on one, whose wit or land,
New battry to thy heart may frame,
Then thinke this name alive, and that thou thus
In it offendst my Genius.

(43-48)

For the poet, the dream of recognition and his strategies to preserve it resolve in the white space between stanzas into a projection of inevitable infidelity. The poet's lover, who formerly had been a victim of his impending departure, now becomes, in his imagination, an autonomous agent who will callously forsake him. His engraved name instantaneously loses its power to sustain recognition, for such power depended on the convergence of the woman's desire with his, and her future willingness to read and recognize their love in his signature. Without her loving investment, the now "trembling name"
becomes a hapless victim of her eager sexual abandon, the desiring ease with which she "flings ope the casement" to view a potential suitor. The poet responds to this projected scenario in two ways. First, he tries to vest his name with preternatural life. As an imagined double of the poet's "Genius" (attending spirit),\(^3\) the name takes on the conventional function of a phantom: to convey and re-presentation anger over an injustice which has no material form of redress. The name thus hypothetically the poet's indignation and outrage over his fear that his lover will gladly discard him for another lover during his absence. His second response is related to the first. He attempts to depict his engraved name as a *signature* in the literal sense--as a mark of authorial jurisdiction over a field of signification. When the poet extends the scenario of infidelity in the poem's ninth stanza and imagines his now distant lover receiving a rival's letter, he suggests that his engraved name will displace his rival's as the letter's (and as the woman's) proprietor: "[when] thou begin'st to thaw towards him, for this,/ May my name step in, and hide his" (53-54). In the following stanza, he fantasizes that the dominion of his name will extend even further--into his lover's imagination: "And if this treason goe/ To'an overt act, and that thou write againe;/ In superscribing, this name flow/ Into thy fancy . . . " (55-58). Thus, in the aftermath of the transformation of grief to betrayal, the name ceases to function as an amulet of loss and takes on more proprietary functions--attempting to secure the poet's "claim" over his lover and visiting his
imaginary anger on her as yet unsullied love. The name becomes
not a mediation of grief but an intrusive bearer of the poet's
desire, harboring an imaginary power to perpetuate recognition.

II

Woman's potential for infidelity (her potential to subvert
male proprietary interests and to disrupt recognition) pervades
Donne's poetry. In part, this preoccupation with the female
capacity for license reflects a larger cultural displacement that
shifts male concupiscence onto women, and reviles any
manifestation (even if imaginary) of autonomous female desire.
The early feminist Esther Sowernam, in responding to a
misogynist tract of the early seventeenth century, hints at the
ubiquity of such rhetoric—and at its falseness. She angrily
censures all men for their repeated, unjust assertions of
women's wantonness, a charge she reasons would more aptly
apply to men:

And this shall appear in the imputation which our
adversarie chargeth upon our sexe, to be lacivious, wanton,
and lustful: he sayeth, "Women tempt, allure, and promote
men." How rare a thing is it for women to prostitute and
offer themselves? how common a practise is it for men to
seeke and soliciete women and lewdness? what charge do
they spare? . . . what vowes, oathes, and protestations
doe they spend to make them dishonest? They hire
Pandors, they write letters, they seale them with
damnations, and execrations, to assure them of love,
when the end proves but lust . . . when they have obtained
their purpose, what shall a woman find, just that which is
her everlasting shame and griefe . . . .4
Similarly, Jane Anger, writing in 1588, depicts women as existing in a world fraught with prurient and relentless male advances: "If we cloath our selves in sackcloth, and trusse up our haire in dish clouts, Venerians wil nevertheless pursue their pastime. If we hide our breasts, it must be with leather, for no cloath can keep their long nailes out of out bosomes." The end of such "seductions," according to Anger, is male rage: "so men gloze till they have their answeres, which are the end of their travell, & then they bid Modestie adue, and entertaining Rage, fal a railing on us who never hurt them." It is hard to tell from her phrasing whether men rail because they succeed in their onslaughts or because they fail, but perhaps there is no difference; men rail in either case. For both Anger and Sowernam, the primary point of their writing is the same: the pervasive discourse of women's promiscuity is a male fantasy, a male projection. It is an ideological discourse, not a referential one.

Donne's use of this type of discourse, however, is not simply mimetic; that is, his misogynous aspersions are not simply a conditioned echoing or reiteration of a dominant masculine way of framing women. Instead, as A Valediction of my name, in a window suggests, his misogyny tends to issue from a fairly specific cause—the past or potential loss or subversion of the mirroring relation between men and women, between lovers, a
relation he often imagines as ideal. In the *Valediction*, Donne's poet explicitly links love and mirroring in the second stanza:

'Tis much that Glasse, should bee  
As all confessing, and through-shine as I,  
'Tis more, that it shewes thee to thee,  
And cleare reflects thee to thine eye.  
But all such rules, loves magique can undoe,  
Here you see mee, and I am you.  

(7-12)

For Donne, the window bearing his name is a perfect mirror, for it both delivers to his lover her own image, and simultaneously represents him. Being "through-shine," the window as mirror provides a seductive visual analogue to the poet's representation of himself as open and honest, as "transparent" to her. In a sense, he articulates himself as merging with the mirror, and thus comes to be the means and frame through which his lover can gaze upon herself; he becomes the reflective screen for her narcissistic pleasures. Yet, as a literal mirror, the window is subject to the "rules" of optics and prevents any coalescence of the frame with the framed, of the mirror as poet and the lover's image. It can only offer the woman reflections of herself, not the hypnotic rapture of twinned images, gazes, identifications, desires. "Loves magique," however, according to the poet, knows no such limitations. Through the imaginary powers of love, the mirror itself vanishes as the poet professes a convergence of his being with his lover's: "Here you see mee, and I am you." The lover, in the signed window, thus can manage the inevitability of
loss since it transmits the poet's being to her. The signed window becomes the alembic through which love works the compensatory magic of identification and sustained, mediated recognition.

As Barbara Estrin has recognized, however, "loves magique" does not necessarily engender a symmetrical response to the possibility of loss. Within the contours of the poem, the woman remains passive, a blank screen for the poet's imaginings and projections. In her silence, she signifies the possibility of an alien intent, of the disruption of the dream of symmetry inherent in the poet's specular musings. The poet's reaction to her as yet unmanifested potential for resistance (his response to her unresponsiveness) is to use the window-mirror as a means to write his "I," his name, onto her silent otherness. His wish is that the strategic placement of his name will seduce and control her desire, inducing it to recognize and continue to recognize his desire, luring her to remain attuned to his will and intent. Subjectivity thus would remain, in the identificatory dynamics of the mirror, under his proprietorship where his lover's being should, he imagines, conform to and ultimately become his: "Here you see mee, and I am you." In spite of the suggestion of convergence in the poet's language of identification, however, it very carefully precludes a reciprocal exchange of being between the lovers; the poet does not suggest nor imply that his being will conform to hers. The mirror trope thus evokes a masculine dream of loving symmetry and recognition framed by an
inscription of gendered asymmetry, a desire for attuned likeness folded into a hierarchical formulation of difference. This complexity results from the poet's desire to have the female other function as and remain a mirror for him. As long as the woman loves him, as long as she reflects his will, as long as she bears his desires, she can protect his specular wishes and investments from the thwartings that result from the material and subjective differences of others. Within the poet's dream of permanent mirroring, his departure will not necessarily lead to the loss of his lover as a vivifying external repository and reflection of his desires. Yet in the potential alienness of her subjectivity, she continues to manifest the threat of an inevitable subversion of his wish that the other will become or remain for him a magical double of the self (a recurrent theme in Donne's "Neoplatonic" love poems). Because his lover is potentially different from him and because she also serves to embody his dream of a loving double (an attuned, captivating other), she becomes both the potential speculum for his potentially narcissistic projections and the harbinger of their annihilation. She represents for Donne's poet (to extend the mirror trope further) both sides of the mirror simultaneously: its bright luminescence, portending the jubilation of intersubjective symmetry; and its opaque back, disclosing a material resistance to reflection hidden within the very glass of the mirror.

The interpretive crux in the poem is to explain why the woman's potential for autonomy turns absence into infidelity,
and loss into mistrust. Or to formulate the problem differently, why does anticipation of an uncontrolled separation suddenly change into a scene of the woman's malicious intent, of her lustful forgetting of the poet? This translation of unavoidable loss to a paranoid fantasy of willful disregard is not inevitable for Donne. In poems such as *A Valediction of weeping*, for example, pending separation activates a drowning sense of grief, not explicit fantasies of inconstancy and betrayal. Yet even in that poem, the dissolution of specular emblems--tears--"coined" with a lover's image suggestively if briefly evokes for the poet the threat of woman's infidelity:

Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more,  
When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore,  
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.  
(7-9)

As the poet weeps, his tears bearing his lover's reflected image "fall," gently sounding a note of errancy which is picked up and amplified by the reiteration of the term later in the same line. For the poet, the "fall" of his lover's image involves a "fall" of the woman herself: "thou falls which it bore." And through an adventitious homonymy, the poet registers his sense of a moral failing in this descent: the lover who "falls" is simultaneously "false."  

It is perhaps this undercurrent that licenses the absolute sense of loss and annihilation of the following line: "So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore."
Still, this poem, unlike *A Valediction of my name, in a window*, remains awash with the dynamics of grief, submerging most projections of infidelity. It is as if Donne has two poetic responses to the loss of the female other as mirror, to the problem of specular bereavement: consuming grief over potential or past separation from the mirroring other, and misogynous rancor over the projected culpability of woman for that loss. Perhaps the reason that *A Valediction of my name, in a window* comes to focus on potential infidelity is that it is not interested in the affective dynamics of grief, but rather in the preservation of the mirroring relation itself. The poet's attempt to use his engraved name and the window to ensure his lover's continued investment in him recognizes that the mirroring relation itself is not his; it is not, in its fundamental structure, a proprietary relation. The poet's fear is that the mirroring relation, and by extension his specular investments in both himself and his lover, lie in the purview of her will and desire, in the agency of a potentially autonomous women.

III

Thomas Docherty has asserted that woman, in Donne's poetry, proves a problem because "she threatens the male proper name with dissolution." She accomplishes this, according to Docherty, because in her potential for autonomy she represents change, evanescence, male subjection to historical process. It is not, however, any sort of change that threatens Donne or the
patronym, or some notion of change in general, but rather changes which disrupt the possibility of mirroring, of symmetry, of intersubjective recognition. In the elegy, *Change*, for example, Donne's poet specifically and perhaps audaciously embraces change in woman as evidenced by the poem's final lines: "Change's the nursery/ Of musicke, joy, life, eternity" (35-36). But as the body of the poem discloses, the poet does not embrace change easily or simply. In fact, the poem begins with the misogynous notion that woman's sexuality, an overdetermined marker of "female" change for men, involves the poet's lover in an inevitable syndrome of infidelity in spite of her actions to the contrary:

Although thy hand and faith, and good works too,  
Have seal'd thy love which nothing should undoe,  
Yea, though thou fall back, that apostasie  
Confirme thy love; yet much, much I feare thee.  
Women are like the Artes, forc'd unto none,  
Open to all searchers, unpriz'd, if unknowne.  
If I have caught a bird, and let him file,  
Another fouler using these means, as I,  
May catch the same bird; and, as these things bee,  
Women are made for men, not him, nor mee.  

(1-10)

In the first four lines, the only lines in the poem actually addressed to the woman, Donne's poet toys with his fear over the implications of women's sexuality. His lover, having "seal'd" her love to him, a term which Donne uses in *The Relique* to signify an ideal of virginity (see line 31), paradoxically breaks and affirms that seal by "falling back" into sexual position for her lover. Her
sexual availability becomes an "apostasy," a term whose resonance with notions of deviation and turpitude is amplified by its placement at the end of an enjambed line. Female sexuality thus adumbrates if it doesn't actually enact betrayal even as it serves simultaneously as a confirmation of love and of the woman's recognition of male desire. For the poet, however, the woman's sexual display appears troubling because it seems to anticipate rather than strictly imitate his sexual interest. Immediately after having "seal'd" her love, she falls back, affirming perhaps a certain willful desire in the realm of erotic performance. Though ostensibly her act confirms the symmetry cradled in love, for the poet it quickly elicits the myth of women's licentiousness deplored by Anger and Sowernam. Women's sexuality threatens because it cannot, according to the poet, be captivated or enthralled by any one man; the symmetry of heterosexual erotics does not, and within the poet's rhetoric, cannot endure, for it is a realm of excess, knowing no limits. Its desire is not and, according to the poet's projection of women's nature, cannot be captured within any single, specular relation with a man. In this sense, women, according to the poet, are like animals, ravening in bodily appetite, subject to no particular male form:¹² "Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please./ Shall women, more hot, wild, wily then these,/ Be bound to one man, and did Nature then/ Idly make them apter to'endure then men?" (11-14)
Surprisingly, however, this fantasy of women's licentiousness does not lead to a rejection of women. Instead, it leads the poet to redefine the conditions of heterosexual symmetry in a way which incorporates infidelity and change while attempting to reformulate masculine control:

By nature, which gave it; this liberty,
Thou lov'st, but Oh! canst thou love it and mee?
Likeness glues love: then if soe thou doe,
To make us like and love, must I change too?
More than thy hate, I hate it, rather let mee
Allow her change, then change as oft as shee,
And soe not teach, but force my'opinion
To love not any one, nor every one.

(21-28)

The poet's primary fear is woman's "liberty," a gift of nature, which intrudes on the possibility of her having any enduring symmetrical attachment with a man. He responds to his assertion of woman's license, however, not simply by reviling it, but by imitating it. In his mind, "likeness glues love," and the only way for him to conform to his lover's potential for liberty is to "change as oft as shee." Change and infidelity thus become, paradoxically, the criteria for symmetry. Even though the poet hates the idea of his lover's rejection of him, he hates the idea of her sexual freedom and change more, and consequently seeks to control that change by anticipating it and asserting that he will reproduce it. The trick in this masculine "allowing" of woman's infidelity and change is that the poet will reproduce it first—that is, before his lover. So far, in the poem, the woman has
simply fallen back in sexual availability to him alone. Even though he asserts that she will change first—"let mee/ Allow her change, then change as oft as shee"—and that he will simply imitate her "and soe not teach," yet since her licentiousness exists only in the realm of his imaginings, his ambivalent identification with her liberty becomes a justification for his own sexual freedom. His imitative thrust thus reaffirms a form of heterosexual symmetry while ostensibly offering a means of controlling her desire. He will put her in his place: that of a jealous partner. In this strange fantasy of power, male infidelity and change become both the mirror of women's nature and the ground of the poet's dream of his lover's eventual, coerced fidelity. The poet, it seems, believes that if he can control the dynamics of symmetry, then he can control the dynamics of attachment and love in spite of women's autonomy. Thus, because he can script his lover's liberty as paradoxically controlled by his symmetrical change and because he can thereby assume mimetic propriety over such change, he can ironically bear change's loving disregard of propriety: "But when they kisse one banke, and leaving this/ Never looke backe, but the next banke doe kisse,./ Then they are the purest" (33-35). Through his strategy of anticipatory symmetry, the poet strives to force conformity even as he embraces variability. His own involvement in change and libertinism can be accepted because they are reflected and in a sense originate in the other.
A similar attempt to mediate the power of women's autonomy occurs in *Woman's Constancy* where the threat of change and abandonment which dominates the opening stanza is distanced and finally patronized by the poet's assertion that he too, by the next day, may opt for inconstancy. The poem begins with an abrupt conversion of love to a witty, paranoid reasoning about the woman's departure:

Now that thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
To morrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?
Wilt thou Antedate some new made vow?
Or say that now
We are not just those persons, which we were?
(1-4)

According to the poet himself, the only *known* emotion or attitude which his lover discloses is love. Yet in his projections, she appears as some sort of Heracleitean sophist, a duplicitous orator of inconstancy and material flux. His irritation with her, however, does not simply concern her potential (inevitable) rejection of him, but also his anticipation of her witty justifications for her behavior. Like many of Donne's own poet-figures, she apparently has the capacity to spin argument after argument and to reverse a flow of thought in mid-stream. To escape the verbal compacts that buttress fidelity, the poet assumes that she will spring a repertoire of deft rhetorical maneuvers. She might play with the date of a vow, or argue for an atomistic subversion of identity. Or perhaps, as he imagines at the end of the stanza, she could reason by ingenious analogy:
"as true deaths, true maryages untie,/ So lovers contracts, images of those,/ Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose?" (8-10) Throughout this stanza, the poet imagines that his lover's pending abandonment of him will be accompanied by a power of rhetorical dissembling that matches his, that literally is his. In his fantasy of her inevitable change, he imagines her verbal ability to dissemble as a dark supplement to her inconstancy. Her verbal control, her subjectivity, thus becomes the projected model for his own verbal mobilization. His wit becomes a reactive identification to what he projects as hers.

To negate the imaginary power of his lover's differing subjectivity, the poet articulates her (fantasized) liberation from the mutuality of their love as a mad act of power and rivalry, an effectively impotent grasp for autonomy (since it requires his tolerance):

Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could
Dispute and conquer, if I would,
Which I abstain to doe,
For by to morrow, I may thinke so too.

(13-16)

The poet constructs for himself two scenarios of narcissistic recuperation in response to his belief that his lover will break the mirror of their love. First, he asserts that he could engage in and win a fight for rhetorical mastery with her by turning their oppositional symmetry into a hierarchy in which he would verbally dominate her. Though their wit is similar, his is more
powerful; he can beat her in the realm of rhetorical force. Yet this attempt to re-affirm his power does not satisfy the desires which his lover's projected behavior elicits, for he raises the issue of verbal domination only hypothetically, only in order to retract it. Perhaps he believes that such an act of mastery would not redress his imaginary loss, the loss of loving symmetry and unforced recognition. His abstention from verbal combat then cedes to another solution: his continued imitation of her. If the mirror of love must change, the change itself can be symmetrical, mutual. Identification can either be a function of captivation or of a desire for structured distanciation. The woman's departure, at least hypothetically, can be mediated if not controlled, for if the poet so chooses, her inconstancy, her act of autonomy, will only reduplicate his desire, his choice, his will. They, almost like a parent and growing child, can separate together. Paradoxically, through the woman's projected leavetaking, a fantasy of intersubjective symmetry is preserved in the very negation of love. By his choice (or his attempt to master her choice), the poet and his lover will become symmetrically autonomous, specularly free. They will give up the threatened pleasures of recognition for the more distanced gratifications of sexual autonomy.

IV

Woman's potential for autonomy, and her consequent power to solicit, disrupt and void male desire, however, does not appear in
Donne's poetry solely in the form of a denigrated promiscuity. Women also serve, as Janel Meuller has noted, as the ostensibly autonomous double whom Donne's poets often solicit or require to ratify their erotic or amorous desires.\textsuperscript{13} In \textit{The Dreame}, for example, Donne presents a poet-seducer who addresses a "lover" in the transitional moments between sleep and waking, between the realm of dreams and the realm of culturally framed, conscious embodiment. His hope is that even after his waking the woman will desire to conform to the "fantasy space"\textsuperscript{14} of his dreams, establishing a symmetry, a sameness, between these conventionally opposed realms:

\begin{quote}
Therefore thou wak'dst me wisely; yet
My Dreame thou brok'st not, but continued'st it,
Thou art so truth, that thoughts of thee suffice,
To make dreames truths; and fables histories;
Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best,
Not to dreame all my dreame, let's act the rest.
\end{quote}

(5-10)

The poem had begun in what for Donne is an almost archetypal moment: a jarring recognition of the autonomous power of woman. That power had manifested itself in the female intruder's (lover's?) decision to wake the poet, breaking his "happy dreame" (2). Almost immediately, however, the poet strives to minimize that act, formulating it not as a disruption but as a continuation of his desires. In his seductive attempt to meld fantasy into reality, he articulates his lover not as an "other," as a potential figure of resistance who can void the
licentious oblivion of his reveries, but as the means through which to convert dreams to truths, to convert fable and fantasy into the stuff of personal history. She becomes, in effect, the potential speculum through which his nocturnal imaginings can be emitted, reflected, recognized, ratified, enacted. The poet desires her as a figure who can incarnate a waking simulation of his erotic fantasies, as an other who can convert the real itself into a desiring imitation, a specular double, of his private fantasy. For the poet, this hypothesized conversion would lessen the potential frustration and isolation associated with any acceptance of a lover's inevitable differences from him. Thus the woman's act of waking him becomes evidence of a shared, not autonomous, intent: "since thou thoughtst it best,/ Not to dreame all my dreame, let's act the rest" (9-10). In the poet's ambiguous phrasing, the woman's disruption of the poet's sleep, of his ability to dream "all" his dream, also ends her dreaming "all" of his dream. In fact, given the poet's syntax, the sense that she terminates her own dreaming of his dream is stronger than the sense that she has terminated his. Her rousing of him, then, cannot be construed as an act of difference. For the poet, it is merely an inflection of a symmetry, of a specular relation, that was already in place.

But as Donne's poet seems to comprehend, mutually desiring symmetry is not so easily conjured, nor is woman's autonomy so easily seduced or specularized by male erotic fantasy. The woman's silent refusal between stanzas to "act" the poet's
dream, her resistance to his fantasy of erotic symmetry, does not blunt or deflate his wish to solicit her as an autonomous reflection and ratification of his lust. Instead, it incites him to repeat his attempt to convert difference into similarity, to translate his private desire into mutual coupling. In effect, it provokes him to language, to an overt wish to exchange desires beyond the solipsistic domain of his dreams. He continues his seduction by vesting his lover with a preternatural access to his mind and heart, and suggesting that her rousing of him was a knowing, reflective, desiring response to the rising action of his dream. This absolute recognition of his desire, according to the poet, establishes a powerful concord between them, and convinces him of her identity:

But when I saw thou sawst my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an Angels art,
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when
Excesse of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,
I doe confess, it could not chuse but bee
Prophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee.
(15-20)

For the poet, the exquisite timing of his lover's intrusion into his dream could not have been accidental; it is a sign of shared interiority, of a perfect doubling of the poet's desire. In his seductive fantasy, he imagines her as commingling his interiority with her exteriority; she is, for him, simultaneously self and other. And because she remains other than the poet, yet in his continuing fantasy may not differ from him in the realm of
desire, she potentially allows his hermetic, narcissistic fancies
to be imitated, ratified, reproduced in a material speculum. She
permits his fantasy of erotic, specular pleasure to become other
yet remain available for his potential consumption.
Consequently, he revels in what he suggests is her intentional
solicitation of him to wake precisely at the moment of climactic
transition when erotic reverie would register as bodily pleasure,
when his erotic fancies are just at the point of becoming "real."
His lover, he imagines, recognizes that the "excesse of joy"
rising in his dream requires the body of an other for satisfactory
consummation. Rather than allowing him to climax in his sleep,
and to terminate the pleasure of his phantasmic staging of
sexuality with an oblivious nocturnal emission, she rouses him,
giving him the possibility of adding to the excessive pleasure of
fantasy the ecstasy of performing a real simulation of that
pleasure. The poet, by framing his lover as a desiring speculum,
hopes to engender an impossible abolition of difference--not only
between his own and his lover's desire, but between what is
imaginary and what is real. Because the woman is an infinitely
repetitive source of arousal--she arouses him in his dreams,
from his dreams, in the real and paradoxically from the real--and
because she is potentially the same for the poet materially and
phantasmically, she functions as a sort of specular relay through
whom he wishes to induce a magical symmetry, an identity,
between the realm of dreams and the realm of waking, and
between desire and gratification.
The woman's potential to reflect the poet's desire, however, has unsettling ramifications for her since it causes him to frame her identity as an effect of his dream of symmetry. Because the woman came and roused the poet at the most propitious moment and therefore, in his mind, anticipated and responded to his desire, he momentarily disavows any thoughts of her non-coincidence with herself, as if her identity depends on her ability to act in congruence with him: "I doe confesse, it could not chuse but bee/ Prophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee." In her imaginary conformity to his desire, it would be prophane for him to think her identity suspect. This disavowal implies, however, that in any circumstance in which she did not reflect or reproduce his desire, it would be reasonable to assume that she was not herself, that her identity was a construction invaded by self-difference. The woman, then, at least in the eyes of the poet, only has identity as a mirror, as a flawless speculum for male desires, and any deviation from the seamless repetition and recognition of those desires would mean that she differs not only from him, but from herself. Thus, when she silently rejects his seductions after the second stanza, he immediately impeaches her identity, her self-congruence: "Comming and staying shew'd thee, thee,/ But rising makes me doubt, that now,/ Thou art not thou" (21-23). Her self-presencing act of waking the poet, apparently, had granted her identity in his eyes, but her "rising," a gesture of departure, signifies an autonomy, a negation of the poet's seductions, that makes him question her
conformity to his fantasies, and makes him doubt whether the "thou" of his desire is the same "thou" that signifies the woman as other. By rising, she forces a resolute otherness into the rhetoric of his fantasy and seduction.

The act of rising, however, because the gerund floats without explicit linkage to a subject, does not solely refer to the woman. The poet's ambiguous phrasing also suggests that the poet himself undergoes a "rising" which has discomfitted his dream of symmetry, and consequently his ability to fuse the woman into his fantasy. Apparently, in her resistance to his seductive overtures, she makes his own "rising" subvert the realm of his fantasies. On the one hand, as the woman exercises her autonomy, she differs from his projections and seductive inscriptions of her: "thee" is not "thee." The poet connects the woman's deviation from his dream with his rise into the waking world. In his partial emergence from the realm of fantasy, the poet sees the specular congruence he has seductively constructed between his lover and himself as possibly having vanished, which he attributes to a non-identity, a lack, in her. As a non-reflecting other, she differs from herself and differs from his attempt to frame her as a narcissistically construed double. And through the poet's sexual pun on the term "rising," this sudden recognition of difference seems to be linked to an intrusion of his gendered, bodily response to the woman's presence. As the poet's phallus rises to prominence, he begins to submit his dream of symmetry and his lover's function as specular other to a
rhetoric of mistrust. Significantly, his very mode of seduction itself changes. For rather than continue to try to enthrall the woman with fantasies of perfect symmetry and mutuality, he begins to attack her for her otherness:

That love is weake, where feare's as strong as hee;  
'Tis not all spirit, pure, and brave,  
If mixture of Feare, Shame, Honor, have;  
Perchance as torches which must ready bee,  
Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with mee,  
Thou cam'st to kindle, goest to come; Then I  
Will dreame that hope againe, but else would die.  

(24-30)

The problem with the woman, according to the poet, is twofold. First, her love is not unmitigated concupiscence nor does her amorous desire flow unadulterated within the binary channel of specular captivation. Instead, her love responds to social as well as erotic promptings. Paradoxically, for the poet-seducer, his lover's culturally motivated chastity marks an impurity in her love. Hidden in the poet's insinuation that the woman's love is impure is his wish to fend off the intrusion of the norms and values of "others" into the mirroring relation which he still hopes to conjure in her. By responding to the summons of fear, shame and honor, the woman opens what the poet fantasizes as the symmetry of their desire to discursively engendered restrictions, submitting the "purity" of their imaginary specular erotics to the repressive force of the societal codes organizing sexuality. For the poet, this marking of the woman by other
voices, this "adulteration," mars her ability to function satisfactorily for him as a speculum; for as long as she heeds these voices, she will always deviate from his fantasy--she will always be disfigured by an otherness which is not properly hers (or his), and consequently will never become the other-myself which he wishes her to be. The woman's divergence from the poet's dream of symmetry also leads him to accuse her of a second problem--fickleness (a form of inconstancy). Rather than responding to his phallic rising by gratifying him sexually, the woman apparently intends to abandon him in the dependent vulnerability of his desire. In the eyes of the poet, his sexual longing for her and her autonomy vests her with an instrumental power over him since she can both "kindle" and extinguish his phallic flame. Because he sees her as exercising this power arbitrarily, because she can solicit and void his desire, he imagines her as having no consistency, no constancy. The woman's power over the poet's genital desire also forces him to sense (if not recognize) the autonomy, the capriciousness, of the phallus itself which, without a symmetrically attuned sexual other, rises and falls in accord with the other's (or perhaps no-one's) intentions and desires. Divorced from the dream of symmetry, from a congruently desiring other, the phallus does not belong to the subject. Instead, paradoxically, the woman functions as its proprietor. Thus, rather than serving the poet's dream of erotic symmetry, the phallus becomes a signifier of
self-difference, for it mimes, according to the poet, the autonomy of the other.

In the poem's final couplet, the woman's resistance to being subsumed within the poet-seducer's fantasy leads him to imagine death as a fitting response to her autonomy: "Then I/ Will dreame that hope againe, but else would die." If he cannot recover the symmetry and recognition of his purported dream, then he will choose annihilation. It is at this point that the desire for symmetry and genital erotics explicitly diverge. Because of the woman's chastity and her consequent disruption of his fantasy of an eroticized mirroring other, the poet frames his hope for the dreamy congruence of his and the woman's desire as being opposed to his desire to "die"--a wish for annihilation fraught with sexual overtones. His continuing desire, in the voidance of loving symmetry, is for a self-destruction which specifically includes the climactic death of the phallus. The joke, of course, is that such a "death" is precisely what he has been asking for all along, and therefore intimates no change. But what is at stake in this "death" is the poet's final vestige of masculine self-control; for what he intends to "kill" is his involuntary rising in both senses of the term: his arousal from a realm of specular fantasy to a "waking" realm marked by the possibility of woman's autonomy; and the rising of his penis, a bodily response whose miming of the other voids the illusion that the subject controls or directs desire. In the death of consummation, the poet can return to sleep, to the oblivion of a sexual realm which ebbs
away from the other's control of the phallus. He can also annex as part of his desire the strangely divisive force of his rising. This appropriation would allow a remnant of masculine subjectivity to continue beyond the loss of his dream of symmetry. In the poet's waggish desire to "die," he can finally, paradoxically, master his phallus, and the asymmetry between self and other which it marks. He can exchange his desire for recognition with a desire for death. Or, if his seduction eventually succeeds, he can acquire recognition from his ideal woman: one who is both the same as he is, perfectly reflecting his desires, and different, capable of conferring recognition which has value.

V

Donne's poetry insistently and ambivalently wrestles with woman's power as an erotic subject. In the contentious intimacies generated by his desire for recognition, he deplores and desires that power. In late Elizabethan and Jacobean England, however, there were conventional ways to blunt both women's power and men's ambivalence towards it. The traditionally sanctioned way to control women's potential for autonomy was the institution of marriage. In the conduct books of the period, the subordination of a wife to her husband was "axiomatic" even if many overseers of public mores also emphasized that married couples ought to participate in certain forms of domesticated mutuality. The rhetoric of woman's necessary submission in
her "domestic partnership" with her husband drew sustenance from the general restriction of property rights granted to women during the period and the increasing difficulty for women to acquire any means of sufficient economic subsistence outside of marriage.\textsuperscript{17} As Helen Carr has noted, the growth of the gentry and the middle class during the period limited women's productive capacities because, for a variety of complex reasons, these changes severely undermined many women's ability to establish autonomous spheres within the economy.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, most women found it necessary to attach themselves to a man in the sexual compact of marriage.\textsuperscript{19} The dominant trend of the period, at least at the level of ideology, was to try to engender women as perfect foils for male narcissistic desires: they were to be subordinate in terms of legal and social power, yet symmetrical in the "mutuality" of the conjugal partnership. Thus the tensions of intersubjective erotics and relations of power were muted by structures of social authority. But in spite of the strategic role marriage played in early modern England in sustaining male dominance and domesticating the dynamics of desire, Donne does not grant it such power or efficacy in his poetry. As \textit{Loves Alchymie} suggests, marriage cannot rescue men from the threats that women pose to male desires and fantasies of domination. For in the poem's cynical murmurings, love's mystery is a dark abyss which eludes the structuring of marriage and produces neither ungendered symmetry nor phallic mastery, but rather only
disillusioned bitterness. Marriage, in the poem, does not resolve the poet's ambivalence about women and love.

The poet begins his assault on love (and, by metonymic displacement, women) quite aggressively, using roguish tropes to depict sexual intercourse as an act of violent instrumentality:

Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne then I,
Say, where his centrique happiness doth lie:
I have lov'd, and got, and told,
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
I should not find that hidden mysterie;
Oh, 'tis imposture all . . .
(1-6)

Love, for the poet, is a potentially interminable cycle of violent, repetitive labor. In his blighted wish to penetrate love's "hidden mysterie," the mystical captivation and pleasure that seems to lie concealed in sexual coupling, the poet imagines that such a quarrying of knowledge can only be produced by a metaphorically brutal excavation of "loves Myne:" woman. Some who apparently have dug particularly deep "say" they have found love's "centrique happiness," a waggish euphemism which yokes into an uneasy alliance the notion of an ethereal bliss at the root of love and the equation of male sexual pleasure with the phallic digging of women's genitals. The poet, however, in his own perpetual "getting," has no such confidence that he himself can find or know love's secrets. For in spite of his recurrent "possessions" of women, he cannot uncover love's mystery. His desire to comprehend love's bliss, the male pleasure found in women,
produces only empty, repetitive simulations in which his sexual "digging" of women mimes yet fails to satisfy his admittedly impossible fantasy of knowledge. Love, for the poet, is an abyss of repetitive, phallic labor which seeks to penetrate a mystery that does not exist ("Oh, 'tis imposture all . . ."). The hidden bliss of love, then, its imaginary lure and climax, lies beyond sexual work in an illusion of hidden mystery. And since this quest to penetrate the mystery of love is "imposture," since it is marked by skepticism rather than hope or belief, sexual relations for the poet come to consist entirely of repetition, of a metaphorically violent, feckless reaming of what the poet portrays as an inert, female body. Because woman cannot produce an epiphany in which desire and phallic bliss coalesce, she becomes for the poet a signifier of the impotence and emptiness of the male desire for carnal knowledge. Men's mining of woman produces only an interminable desiring drift; it cannot produce knowledge, recognition, closure. Orgasm is not understanding--or mastery.

The failure of the sexual excavation of women's bodies to reveal love's "hidden mysterie," however, does not preclude it from producing other effects since women's bodies, contrary to the connotations of the poem's opening trope, are not inert. As the poem progresses, the poet hints at one relatively autonomous power that women possess--the ability to produce babies. Through the resources of their bodies, women, like alembics, can
perform an alchemical transformation of masculine intent and
desire; they can change "getting" into "begetting:"

And as no chymique yet th'Elixir got,
    But glorifies his pregnant pot,
    If by the way to him befall
Some oderiferous thing, or medicinally,
    So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,
    But get a winter-seeming summers night.
(7-12)

For the poet, this transformation is not pleasant. Like a
"Chymique" who searches after the elixir which will unfold the
mysteries of material change but who discovers only ineffectual,
divergent proxies, male lovers in their quest for sexual bliss only
succeed in glorifying their "pregnant pot" (woman), and thereby
turn their dream of lasting pleasure into an ephemeral interlude
of hot but chilling darkness. The male quest to discover a
quintessence in the alembic of the female body must submit,
against its will, to processes of dissemination. The findings of
this quest, if any occur, come accidentally, "by the way." Male
desire, in the transformative matrix of woman, deviates from its
intended course as conjugal contact begets implicitly unwanted
"concoctions" and a dissembling frigidity intrudes upon the sultry
nocturnal realm of dreams and fantasy. The poet comes to
recognize that he cannot get from love or woman what he
desires--a "centrique happiness." Instead of such centered
pleasure, his sexual forays only produce repetitive acts or
children—refractory simulations of his imaginary wants. For the poet, there is no gold in the alchemy of love.

The poet's skepticism and misogyny towards women, however, is not primarily concerned with the dissemination of male desire in woman's "pregnant pot" or with the contemporary male anxiety (shown dramatically by Leontes in *The Winters Tale*) that woman controls the "truth" of patrilineal descent (that the products of love's alchemy--children--cannot be unequivocally known to belong to any particular man). Rather, the poet rejects women and love because neither can produce the truth of desire which he seeks. Consequently, in the poem's second stanza, he cynically interrogates the idea that love involves a mysterious symmetry of minds consecrated in and by marriage:

    Ends love in this, that my man,
    Can be as happy'as I can: If he can
    Endure the short scorne of a Bridesgroomes play?
    That loving wretch that sweares,
    'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes,
    Which he in her Angelique findes,
    Would sweare as justly, that he heares,
    In that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey, the spheraes.
           (15-22)

Love is suspect here because it does not confer homosocial recognition; it does not aggrandize and differentiate the poet from his subordinate. Amorous pleasure, since it contains no *hidden* mystery, is equally open to all. There can be, then, no distinction between a cognoscenti of love who know its mystery and others, less informed, who merely experience its pleasures.
In the act of love, all men, regardless of rank or status, must submit to the same desire and illusory jubilation; all men in love are similar (and therefore, in some sense, potentially exchangeable). The servant who hears in the mutuality of marriage a deep, intersubjective harmony may be deluded, but his belief in a celestial concord in love echoes the poet's own disavowed belief in love's "hidden mysterie." As a newly wrought skeptic, the poet lampoons his man's imputed confidence that love transforms his marriage "dayes rude hoarse minstralsey" into an echo of cosmic euphony. At the same time, however, the poet's skepticism is at least partially an effect of rivalry, which Rene Girard has argued stems form a desire to exclude an other from desiring and having the same things that the self desires. Rivalry consequently appears to involve a wish to establish and reify hierarchical differences.\textsuperscript{20} By ridiculing his man's trust in the cosmic symmetries engendered in love, the poet marks his knowing superiority in the amorous realm. Marriage, sexual coupling, loving symmetry, all become, in the poet's cynicism, impostures, like the poet's disavowed wish to find love's mystery. There is no enthralling symmetry, no wondrous concord, in love. Value lies, instead, only in the prestige of class differences, in sophistication, which love itself renders vulnerable.

The cynicism and skepticism of Donne's poet, however, does not end with his mockery of his man's beliefs. In the poem's final couplet, he refocuses his aggression on what throughout the poem
has proven a more continuing threat—woman: "Hope not for
minde in women; at their best,/ Sweetnesse, and wit they'are,
but, Mummy, possest" (23-24). Lacking mind, women cannot
participate in the mutuality or symmetry that undergirds both
the rhetoric of marriage as a domestic partnership and the notion
of a "hidden mysterie" in love. "At their best," women are but
vehicles for men's superficial, consumptive pleasures. But when
"possest," either sexually or in marriage or perhaps even
demonically, they prove much less appealing, becoming "mummy,"
a term signifying a medicinal substance made from dead bodies,
dead flesh itself, a vital remedy, or a pulpy mass. Like the
pregnant pot of the poem's first stanza, women as "Mummy" are
simultaneously inert and potentially transformative. They
become, on the one hand, figures of death, a projected analogue,
perhaps, of Donne's frequent depiction of phallic climax as a form
of extinction. Conjugal relations (including marriage), it seems,
inevitably bring men into contact with this fleshy, cadaverous
other whose pure materiality threatens to deaden masculine
consciousness. Even when "possest," even when figuratively
"dead," women threaten male autonomy because they generate
male desire without adequately reflecting it; inert, objectified,
possessed, women cannot confer recognition. They cannot reveal
love's mystery. On the other hand, however, women also serve
men, according to the poet's ambiguous phrasing, as a sort of
medicinal balm. In their subordination, women remedy the lack
of proprietary divination that the poet longs for but cannot
valorize in amorous coupling. Through a shift in the poet's emphasis from the alchemy of love to gendered relations of power, women (as products of death) transform male insufficiency into a cynical illusion of homosocially based mastery. This secondary gloss of the term "mummy" as a balm supplements the couplet's articulation of women as gladsome trifles. For the poet, having given up the possibility that love can by anything more than unending sexual expenditure, cynicism becomes the poet's final means of recognition. By objectifying women as mummy (or as wives), he divorces them from the subjectivity that would make their erotic responsivness valuable to him. Marriage and sexual possession, in this poem, deaden love, leaving a homosocial desire for recognition as its discontented replacement.

Marriage, then, as it appears in Loves Alchymie, does not preserve or satisfy the desire for intersubjective symmetry and recognition that pervades so much of Donne's amorous poetry. Similarly, in Donne's elegy *His parting from her*, marriage also fails to secure the pleasures of loving symmetry. In fact, in this poem, marriage itself serves as an impediment to the convergence of lovers' desires since the woman involved is married to another. In a sort of conventional "courtly" paradox which also surfaces in *Twicknam Garden*, marriage, rather than helping lovers come together, keeps them apart. Social tradition and authority works against love rather than for it, leaving only the woman's potential for infidelity and adultery to preserve the
attunement of desires which characterizes Donne's depictions of love. The poem begins in the turmoil of a mandated parting:

Since she must go, and I must mourn, come night,
Environ me with darkness, whilst I write:
Shadow that hell unto me, which alone
I am to suffer when my Love is gone.

(1-4)

The poet's grief issues from his inability to control the presence of his lover, his inability to effectively forestall or mediate her loss. As in A Valediction of my name, in the window, the poet tries to use writing to stave off an anticipated disruption of his love. But his more insistent concern, at least initially, is with his own coming isolation and abandonment. While his lover "must go," responding to an as yet undefined necessity, the poet, even before her parting, settles into the dark hell of what he will later suggest is a loss of mirroring. After his lover's departure, he imagines that he will remain behind and suffer "alone," wishing that night would envelope him in a blackness emblematic of his loss, a loss he equates, when he later addresses "Love," with primal chaos:

Isn't because thou thy self art blind, that wee
Thy Martyrs must no more each other see?
Or tak'st thou pride to break us on the wheel,
And view old Chaos in the Pains we feel?

(15-18)

The problem, for the poet, as usual, is that the dreamy duality of love is at least partially subject to an intrusion of external
necessities to which his lover, in her otherness, may respond.

Here, that necessity is her husband:

    Was't not enough, that thou didst hazard us
    To paths in love so dark, so dangerous:
    And those so ambush'd round with household spies,
    And over all thy husbands towring eyes,
    That flamed with oylie sweat of jealousie,
    Yet went we not still on with Constancie?

(39-44)

For the poet, however, the existence of the husband does not necessarily mean that his and his mistress's love need be adulterated or severed by the husband's seemingly panoptic gaze. For even within the purview of the husband's jealousy, the lovers had been able to establish a certain "Constancie" in their relations. The poet implies that it is not the husband's existence which mandates parting, but his lover's response to that existence. She could, as she had done before, sustain constancy with the poet; she could also, however, in the poet's unarticulated but implied accusation, choose to return to her spouse, contravening the poet's fantasy that they share all of their desires. Even though the poet had acknowledged earlier in the poem that she "must" go, relieving her of blame for her parting, his hope here that she maintain constancy infuses her return to her husband with an implicitly moral dimension. If she leaves, it will be a matter of her choice. Consequently, her leavetaking will not only be a separation, but also, at some level, a rejection.
In the poet's ambivalence over his lover's "culpability" for this separation, he holds out to his lover his wish for an unyielding preservation of their love which combines the desire for loving symmetry with audaciously physical assurances of its continuation:

First let our eyes be rivited quite through
Our turning braines, and both our lips grow to:
Let our armes clasp like Ivy, and our feare
Freese us together, that we may stick here.
Till fortune, that would rive us with the deed,
Strain her eyes open, and yet make them bleed.
For Love it cannot be, whom hitherto
I have accus'd, should such a mischief doe.

(57-64)

In *The Extasie*, threaded "eye-beames" and "cimented" hands had initiated a process of captivation that eventually led to an ecstatic symmetry. Here, however, gossamer threads yield to "rivits" and clasping arms and bodies frozen together in fear substitute for gently knit hands. In his fear of privation, the poet translates loving symmetry into a baroque, desperate agglutination which sustains a form of love while subverting its pleasure. His desire to preserve a mode of symmetry between his lover and himself also involves him in a rhetoric which censors his inclination to think that his lover controls their separation, making the non-existent, hypostatized entity "fortune" the subject of his plaint. No longer is "Love" to blame (a word which delicately substitutes for the lover herself) since "Love" would never *intend* such a "mischief" as riving the lovers. Instead, it
must be "fortune" who would split them "with the deed."
Precisely what this "deed" is remains unclear, but the term has obvious sexual connotations.²³ It is as if lovemaking itself, the asymmetrical double of the poet's trope of clasping, frozen symmetry, would function (perhaps must function) as a force of dispersion. Sexuality and fortune, then, (as metonymic adjuncts to the husband's gaze) implicitly serve as the most immediate threats to the poet's wish for continuing loving symmetry. Love itself, however, still tacitly stands accused, for the poet's phrasing of love's innocence--"For Love it cannot be"--sounds more like a blustering disavowal than a statement of necessary logic. Because he believes contradictory things about his lover--she must leave me, she chooses to leave me; she shares my desire and wants to preserve our symmetry, she responds to the promptings of an other--he overtly denies any role for love (and his lover) in her leavetaking, while cryptically implicating them both. Somehow, in the breakdown of symmetry, woman is never innocent.

By censoring love's and his lover's participation in his pending loss, however, the poet can declare the riving power of fortune impotent against love's "shifts:"

Rend us in sunder, thou canst not divide
Our bodies so, but that our souls are ty'd,
And we can love by letters still and gifts,
And thoughts and dreams; Love never wanteth shifts.
(69-72)
Although bodies may part, souls remain knotted together. Through the reciprocal exchange of letters and gifts, and through the mirroring of thoughts and dreams, the symmetry and recognition generated through love can persist beyond physical separation. As long as his lover is not culpable for their parting, the poet can still imagine her as an other attuned to and reflecting his desires. Consequently, when he later entreats her to repulse fortune's attack on their love and to maintain "constancy," the reason is, he tells her, "That I may grow enamour'd on your mind,/ When my own thoughts I there reflected find" (93-94). For the poet, loving captivation explicitly stems from a perception of shared thought and desire. He loves both his own "thoughts," his own desire, in his lover, and also her ability to manifest to him that otherness is not alien, but rather similar, symmetrical, in spite of material difference. Yet imaginary likeness alone cannot guarantee the continuance of love for the poet. Since love is subject to the other's desire, the poet seeks to secure his love with a verbal compact. But instead of asking his lover to submit her love and desire to the law of a lover's troth, he promises his fidelity first: "For this to the comfort of my Dear I vow,/ My Deeds shall still be what my words are now;/ The Poles shall move to teach me ere I start" (95-97). In this ideal convergence of law, desire and the real, there is no slippage between words and deeds unless the world itself wanders from its axis. This fantasy of a perfect mimetic relationship between the poet's logos and its incarnation,
between an unchanging intent and congruent action, however, only applies to the poet himself. His vow, he states, exists only to ensure his "Dear's" comfort. His latent hope, however, seems to be that if he constitutes himself as a paradigm of constancy and fidelity, his lover will imitate him; she will voluntarily assume the expectations and limits of his amorous word. She will continue to recognize him in spite of her potential for autonomy.

He makes this desire explicit in the poem's final couplet:
"Take therefore all in this: I love so true,/ As I will never look for less in you" (103-104). Because his love is "true," because it is trustworthy, he desires and expects the same from his lover. The poet wishes that his lover will commit to a mimetic rather than legal version of fidelity. The poem leaves open, however, any sense of how the woman will respond to the poet's attempt to solicit her fealty. She has already broken the vows of marriage for love, and thus proven herself capable of inconstancy. She also has already responded to a necessity to part, and thus has shown herself to be, to some extent, adulterated by the call of another. Through her reserves of autonomy, she possesses both the power to recognize the poet's love, validating his dream of symmetry, and also the power to leave him, to abandon him, to differ from him, and thereby to destroy his specular fantasy. The poem thus ends suspended in an indeterminate moment between grief, rage and rapture, a moment in which the poet's muted threat to monitor and judge his lover's steadfastness frays into the unknown silence of his lover's
subjective desires, a moment in which his desire for recognition must wait for the other's response.

VI

The complicated and mutable ambivalence towards woman that appears throughout Donne's poetry stems from the latent power and inscrutability of woman's otherness. Her autonomy and her desire, in particular, present Donne with special, baffling concerns since he finds these capacities both enthralling and potentially annihilating. In his fantasies of loving symmetry, he imagines woman as voluntarily mating her desire to his, providing him with an intersubjective experience of love and recognition. He revels in the possibility that the pleasures of love can seduce woman's autonomy, her subjectivity, and lure her to desire his desire. Through this fantasy of recognition, Donne articulates woman as an other-myself, as an amorous mimetic double, different yet the same. Yet even as he engages this fantasy, he registers the menace that woman poses to his desire and masculine identity since invariably his desires cannot control or master hers; his fantasy, though it has verbal power, has no authority. Consequently, his desire for recognition is always, at least implicitly, subject to (or in contention with) the other's desire. Because of her potential for promiscuity, inconstancy, change, separation, and rejection, woman, as imagined by Donne, possesses a capacity for mastery and symbolic violence that rivals his own. For Donne, being with
woman consequently involves pleasure and conflict, a conundrum which, as he self-consciously recognizes in a poem such as *A Valediction of my name, in a window*, intimations and impositions of masculine authority cannot resolve. Love, as Donne imagines it, requires woman's desire, not her forced submission. And since woman's desire can never entirely reflect or recognize his, since she can never be his desire, woman will always manifest the undercurrent of deviance and loss which haunts his fancy. She will always, for Donne, manifest difference, and the complicated interplay of anger, pleasure and grief which attends that recognition.

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2 I take the notion of a "transitional object" from D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, New York: Routledge, 1982, p. 1-25. For Winnicott, a transitional object is a signifying element which exists in an intermediate space between subject and object, and which an infant uses to negotiate the realm of the "not-me." The transitional object, then, is a mediating displacement of the inevitable loss of the other, a mediation, in effect, of loss as such.


5 Anger, "Her Protection for Women," in Ferguson, p. 65.

6 Anger, 68.

7 Male concern with promiscuity during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods may have been due to a peaking in the rate of bastard births during the final decades of the sixteenth century. In Peter Laslett's investigations of several parishes in England, illegitimate births represented nearly five percent of all births during this period, and reached as high as ten percent in some parishes (Family life and illicit love in earlier generations, London: Cambridge U. Press, 1977, p. 104-113). Of course, the relative rate of promiscuity is not strictly measured by Laslett's statistics, as he himself acknowledges. Relative rates of fertility, abortion, miscarriage, and child abandonment affect these statistics as do the ratio of married women to single women and the number of children produced by married women (p. 104-126). However, his findings do suggest that some of the male unease about women's sexuality during this period may have been triggered by a perception of increased bastard births and the consequent unsettling of any "natural" relation between a child and the patronym he or she bears.


9 As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen points out, if one accepts the Lacanian notion of a "mirror stage," the ego itself is always already its own double. Thus the ideal
double is nothing other than the ego itself, already victim of an irreducible externality inherent in its specular constitution. Borch-Jacobsen is critical of the reduction of maternal and affective scenes of identification to a "mirror stage" (Lacan: The Absolute Master, trans., Douglas Brick, Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1991, 44-71)

10This reading was first suggested to me by Edward Snow, and also has affinities with William Empson's notorious reading of the poem in Seven Types of Ambiguity, New York: New Directions, 1966, p. 139-144.


12I use the Platonic echo here intentionally. Donne's version of love, captivated as it is with images, mirrors, structures and forms, operates, even in it deviations, within a platonic field of desire; that is, one in which bodily desire ought to submit to "ideal" structures or forms. Donne often latently frames his desire for masculine control as one such (secularized) form. Borch-Jacobsen makes the point, with which I agree, that the Lacanian notion of the mirror also is, in many ways, platonic (Lacan, 61-65).


15Linda Fitz ("What Says the Married Woman:" Marriage Theory and Feminism in the English Renaissance," Mosaic, 13 (1980) 1-22) argues that the rising emphasis on "domestic partnership" in marriage favored by the protestant bourgeois contributed to rather than alleviated male control of women, for within this formulation, the "overwhelming opinion" was that man was the head of the
household (3-5). In particular, protestant conceptions of marriage sought to co-
-opt female sexuality in a way that property marriages hadn't (see also Joan Kelly,
1984, p. 73). Though some radical protestant groups articulated ideas of
absolute equality between men and women, particularly towards the middle of the
seventeenth century, this was not the norm (Fitz, p. 5, see also Christopher Hill,
differing version of the history of gender relations in early modern England, see

16Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680*, New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press,
1982, p. 90-91. See also Jan de Bruyn, "The Ideal Lady and the Rise of Feminism in

17Women's often debilitating economic dependency on men in early modern
England resulted from a number of social and economic factors, including the
enclosure of common lands, the abolition of nunnery, the undermining of women's
"cottage" industries by more capitalistic modes of production involving male labor,
the failure of law to grant women adequate property and inheritance rights, and
an inflationary economy which saw a steady decline in real wages well into the
early decades of the seventeenth century (on wages see Wrightson, p. 125, on
other factors see Fitz, p. 2-11).

18Carr, "Donne's Masculine Persuasive Force," in *Jacobean Poetry and Prose,
Rhetoric Representation and the Popular Imagination*, ed., Clive Bloom, New York:
St. Marten's, 1988, p. 98.
Joan Kelly, p. 14. The fact that men normally waited longer to marry than women also attests to this imbalance.

Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans., Patrick Gregory, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1977. Girard's focus is on the imitative structure of desire. He views desire not simply as a longing for an object, but as a desire to have what another desires. This imitative structure of desire causes conflicts, since it compels separate individuals to desire the same objects, forcing them into rivalry. One can hear in Girard's analysis echoes of Alexandre Kojeve's formulations of desire according to his neo-Hegelian framework (see *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1980, p. 39-42): "Hegel says that the being that is incapable of putting its life in danger in order to attain ends that are not immediately vital--i. e. the being that cannot risk its life in a Fight for Recognition, in a fight for pure prestige, is not a truly human being" (41). Mimetic desire, as formulated by Girard, induces such a fight for recognition.


George Parfitt argues that Donne's poetry is more "Innes of Courtly" than courtly, emphasizing the differences between Donne's style and thematic orientation and those of Spenser, Sidney and other contemporaries (*English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century*, New York: Longman, 1985, p. 18-26). His point is valid, but Donne's splitting of a transgressive, enthralling love from marriage (implicitly arranged) is common in courtly literature even if his treatment of this splitting is not.

See, for example, Donne's own reference to "Gentle love deeds" in *Loves growth* (ln. 19-20).
The Fragility of Attunement:  
Separation, Melancholy and Grief

Love resides, for Donne, in the hypnotic drama of twinned eyes and desires, in the pleasures of amorous symmetry and recognition. But as much of his poetry attests, this vision of love is troubled in a variety of ways. One important source of vexation, as I have previously suggested, is the bodily dynamics of heterosexual desire. Because carnal love focuses more on genitals than on reflected gazes, it involves Donne in certain conventional male anxieties about sexual performance, including the "sorrowing dulness to the minde"¹ which he asserts is the inevitable aftermath of orgasm. Consummated love, in spite of its allure, proves troubling because it disrupts the dream of symmetry that Donne finds so appealing and because it represents a loss of masculine dreams of mastery based on phallic control. Since the phallus seems to rise and fall of its own accord when aroused, apparently heeding its own imperatives (or those of the female other), it suggests to the poet that his own body deviates from his willed desires, that they are not symmetrical. In addition, the genital emphasis in carnal love calls attention to gendered differences, to a separation, between the self and female other, not similarity.² A second, related problem haunting Donne's fantasy of loving
symmetry is that it stems form a desire for intersubjective attunement and recognition which means that it depends on the other's will and desire for its fulfillment. The convergence of gazes that Donne sees as a metonymy for the convergence of desires between lovers is consequently always vulnerable, for the female other can avert her eyes (and her desire) whenever she chooses. She need not assume nor reflect the male lover's desire. It follows that unless the female other is displaced as the focus of attention by male auditors (or by the audience), she exerts enormous control over the dynamics of recognition. It is she who can intrude difference or separation or loss into Donne's fantasy of love.

Frequently, Donne responds in his poetry to these troubles with anger and verbal aggression. He attempts to impose symmetry on the female other or, in his more cynical moments, to deny that symmetry with any woman is even possible, substituting homosocial for heterosexual recognition. But Donne's desire for recognition, in spite of his frequent lapses into rancor and symbolic violence, cannot be comprehended within a dialectic interplay of mirroring and aggression. For Donne's dream of symmetry is troubled not only by the other's potential for resistance or rivalry, but more "primitively" and fundamentally by possibilities of separation and anticipations of loss, by the very fragility of intersubjective attunement. Loving symmetry, for Donne, may be enthralling, but it is also forebodingly ephemeral, a pleasure that almost invariably bears
within it threats of its immediate or inevitable passing. More than anger or misogyny, it is the deep, often hidden, melancholy stemming from these possibilities that colors Donne's desiring relations with women. Because love as imagined by Donne is so dependent on the other and so frequently vexed by troubles, and because it is so vulnerable to separation and loss, it often seems to tack uneasily against a vast undertow of grief. In Donne's great poems of mourning and loss, this grief surfaces explicitly and threatens to annihilate the poet and his love. The loss of the other is, in these poems, a grievous loss of self which cannot be satisfactorily redressed by verbal belligerence or authorial improvisations of power. The very medium of such improvisations and strategies, poetic language, largely fails as a means to mitigate or allay loss since it cannot permanently secure the recognition of the other. And without her attuned presence, the authorial subject is reduced to mournful conjuring as he tries to avoid becoming a poetic epitaph to love. Without loving recognition, the self that Donne constructs in his poetry is, ultimately, nothing, a subject "re-begot/ Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not."4

Love, for Donne, is haunted by grief, harboring even within its pleasures a restive aquifer of loss. This affiliation can be seen, however, not only in his explicit poems of mourning but also, surprisingly, in some of his most assured poems of love's sufficiency where love and recognition somehow seem to be bound to grief. In Loves growth, to cite an explicit and
paradigmatic example, love does not eliminate or defend against sorrow but at least initially increases it:

But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow
With more, not onely bee no quintessence,
But mixt of all stuffes, paining soule, or sense,
And of the Sunne his working vigor borrow,
Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To Say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse,
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do.

(7-12)

In the conundrum of love, all grief finds a "cure," but only for a brief, enjambled moment—for as the syntax of Donne's poet overruns the end of line 7 and inundates the next, so too does sorrow. Unlike standard medicines, which cure diseases and blights by eradicating them, love remedies grief only by adding to it. To cure the sorrow which precedes, haunts and permeates love, the poet must, according to his own paradox, add to it the ever-expanding anguish of love. Sorrow, then, can be mitigated only by supplementing it, an unending and seemingly self-perpetuating flood of agitation, repetition and augmentation. For the poet, however, the admission of a melancholic structure to love is meant to serve only as part of his larger strategy in the poem: to grant love an incorporative power which not only tolerates but feeds on and grows from diverse influences, affects and actions, from sorrow as well as erotic or contemplative joy. His love is not "so pure and abstract" as the
imaginary loves of other poets who conjure, in solitary conferences with their muses, what love should be. Instead, his love is "mixt of all stuffes," including pain and sorrow; it is, within the fiction of Donne's verse, *real*. And, "being elemented," his love is perdurable, for it possesses the intrinsic, diversified composition necessary to endure the vicissitudes of seasonal change.

The second stanza builds gently on the sufficiency of this "elemented" version of love, suggesting that love's seasonal change from winter to spring is not a change of substance but only of appearance: "And yet no greater, but more eminent,/ Love by the springe is growne;/ As, in the firmament,/ Starres by the sun are not inlarg'd, but shoune . . ." (15-18). Even love's vernal bloom becomes merely an emergence of pre-existing potencies and elements, not a change in substance: "Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,/ From loves awaken'd root do bud out now" (19-20). Love, according to this joyous unfolding, is not afflicted with loss or lack, but only with dormancy or latency. Under the tonic freshets of spring, love's potential pleasures will inevitably effloresce. And love itself will assimilate and harmonize the reverberations of this growth:

If, as in water stir'd more circles bee
Produc'd by one, love such additions take,
Those like to many spheraes, but one heaven make,
For, they are all concentrique unto thee . . .

(21-24)
In this climactic trope, the vernal "additions" stirring the waters of love cohere into a perfect microcosm centered on the poet's lover. She, in her centering presence (a presence emphasized poetically by the sudden intrusion of the term "thee" into the poem and the term's appearance in a strongly accented end rhyme), takes vicissitude and growth and makes it assume an ideal, heavenly form. Through the enchanting force of her being, she translates heterogeneity into concentricity, a form of symmetrical unity, and manifests an analogical correspondance between the mundane—a stirrer in water—and the cosmos. And because her presence assumes a certain centripetal force, drawing the diverse spheres of the lovers' existence into harmonious order, she also implicitly banishes grief which the poet had previously affirmed was ubiquitous in love. Rather than curing all sorrows with more, she organizes a universe that seems full and complete and resolutely centered, free from the emptiness and chaos and deviation associated with sorrow and loss. Yet, surprisingly, the poet's evocation of his lover's centering presence apparently remains, at least to some extent, vulnerable to a subtle infiltration of grief. This hint of melancholy suffuses through the poem's final four lines where the poet feels the need to address and disavow an insistent possibility of change and, perhaps, loss that persists in spite of his lover's focal presence:

And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
As princes doe in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,  
No winter shall abate the springs increase.  
(25-28)

Love's growth, the poet admits, will not entirely eliminate its "winters." In spite of spring's "new heate," love will still descend periodically into hibernal darknesses. Such declinations, however, according to the poet, will exert no power over what love's more fervent seasons have wrought. Elemented of both pleasure and grief, love ministers over a process of incessant accumulation of "all stuffes," and therefore can accommodate opposed constituents without negation. The ardor of spring recognizes the desolations of winter, but through a willed desire that resembles royal fiat, can traverse them. The pleasures and sorrows of love, according to the poet, need not submit to a competitive or rivalrous economy (they are not mutually exclusive), but rather can co-exist without interference in a seasonable cycle of increase. Through this differentiation and accommodation, Loves growth articulates a tenuous authority of love which cultivates pleasure alongside a circumscribed but potentially prodigal field of sorrow.

II

The dexterity with which love and poetry acknowledge yet gloss over the subtle swell of grief in Loves growth depends on the captivating, focal presence of the poet's lover in the second stanza. As love's gravitational center, she compasses grief
within an imaginary cosmology that pivots upon the poet's recognition of her axial presence. In the absence of such a present lover, however, or in the misery of impending separation or loss, grief becomes much more difficult for Donne's poets to circumscribe, veil or control. In *The triple Foole*, a poem explicitly about the relation between poetry and grief (and about Petrarchan histrionics), the poet, apparently responding to the pain of having been denied by his love, uses the self-abasing language of cynical jest to frame his admission that poetry cannot master the mobile and troubling affect of sorrow. Without a centering lover to render love's vexations concentric, the poet begins by disdaining both love and poetry, even though he remains undeniably attached to the imaginary powers of both:

I am two fooles, I know,  
For loving, and for saying so  
In whining Poetry;  
But where's that wiseman, that would not be I,  
If she would not deny?  
Then as th'earths inward narrow crooked lanes  
Do purge sea waters fretfull salt away,  
I thought, if I could draw my paines,  
Through Rimes vexation, I should them allay,  
Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,  
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse.  

(1-11)

The poet has two manifest problems in the poem: his characteristic (heterosexual) male vulnerability to the allure of woman; and his desire to control the flow of grief that follows (seemingly inevitably) from that vulnerability. Caught up in what
he suggests is the foolish captivation of love, the poet
denigrates his amorous condition yet simultaneously affirms
that if the woman returned his love, if her desire reflected his,
no sensible man would refuse to occupy his place. Love, then, in
the poet's cynicism, is foolish only because the dream of
symmetrical desire and recognition that fuels it is subject to the
vicissitudes of the other's inclinations. The woman, in her
refusal to mirror the poet's desire, can shame him with rejection
and loss; she can deny him the amorous recognition that every
"wiseman" longs to attain and which can only come from woman.
For the poet, this inability to attain recognition from the woman
he desires unleashes a related impotence: his inability to rid
himself of the onslaughters of grief. Without the desiring presence
of his love, he cannot control his own affective turmoil. He
responds to this condition by articulating two different means by
which his grief might be mastered: it can be purged, washed away
like the "fretfull salt" which threatens to taint the earth's
aquifer; or it can be "tamed," fettered in verse. The choices, in
some sense, are both literary--catharsis or aesthetic mastery.
Lyric poetry, however, the means through which the poet has
attempted to assuage his grief (and rage), accomplishes neither.
Unlike "th'earths inward narrow crooked lanes" which form
channels for fresh water to flow resolutely seaward, taking any
traces of salt with it, the anguish of separation must be drawn
through "Rimes vexation" which not only conveys grief outward,
but adds something to it. Rather than simply purging grief,
rhyme "vexes" it, a term which suggests an agitation of affect instead of a cleansing release.7 Though the poet imagines that drawing his pains through the structure of poetic language should "allay" them, his own articulation of the operation of "Rime" implies precisely the opposite. The paradoxical tension between "Rime" as vexing or, conversely, as allaying pain suggests the poet's uncertainty about precisely how manipulations of the more aural components of language impinge on the realm of affect. Does "Rime" vex pain, cause it to move so that it can flow outward? Or does it allay grief by submitting it to "numbers," by fettering it in verse?

Julia Kristeva, in a sort of distant echo of the concerns of Donne's poet, attempts to address the relationship between poetics and sorrow in an article on what she calls "the melancholic imaginary."8 Writing specifically about Gerard de Nerval but thinking more universally, Kristeva argues that Nerval's "repetitive, often monotonous, . . . prosody imposes upon affective fluidity a grid as exacting in its deciphering . . . as it is supple and indefinite by its very allusiveness."9 Kristeva speculates that poetic creation itself is a response to a primal sense of melancholy and loss, an attempt to stabilize a disturbing flow of affect by repetitive attempts to arrest it within verbal forms. For Donne's poet, however, prosody (the "numbers" and aural patterns of poetry) does not simply impose a formal structure on a flux of grieving affect. The poet imagines, in concert with Kristeva, that such gridding should be the
function of verse, or, to use his words, that "Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,/ For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse." Yet, even in this explicit assertion of the power of verse to "fetter" grief, the poet tacitly registers a certain tentativeness concerning its effectiveness. In the first line of the couplet, this tentativeness surfaces in the anxious, almost subjunctive mood of the verbal negation "cannot be," which intimates the poet's desire to believe a taming function for verse rather than any firm conviction in its truth. This note of uncertainty subtly colors the line that follows, undermining the assertive confidence of its verbs. If grief is so assuredly tamed and fettered by verse, then why is the poet uncertain about the ability of prosody ("numbers") merely to lessen grief's ferocity, to qualify it ("cannot be so fierce," my italics)? This hint of doubt in what should be an almost tautological argument (numbers lessen grief's ferocity because verse tames grief, where numbers and verse are essentially synonymous) registers the poet's continuing concern that verse adds vexation to sorrow rather than simply "gridding" it. Verse, apparently puts affect into a flow that mimics catharsis but is not, ultimately, purgative.

Throughout the first stanza, the poet seems to be struggling with what he articulates as a distressing interanimation of grief and lyric creation, with what Kristeva formulates as "affectivity at grips with signs--exceeding, threatening, or modifying them." What the poet seems to desire is that his poetry will
present "the marks of an affective reality, present, palpable to
the reader . . . and nevertheless dominated, kept at a distance,
vanquished." But in its perversity, his poetry does not follow
the path of his (or Kristeva's) desire, resisting and perhaps
ultimately subverting his creative intent or will. Consequently,
the poet's attempt to submit affect to the "grid" of poetry not
only vexes his grief, but also his very status as an authorial
subject, which stems from his ability to use language as an
implement of self-affirmation and self-control.

The failure of language to contain grief or to support the
poetic subject emerges forcefully in the second stanza when the
poet imagines the appearance of a sort of "minstrel" who
appropriates his lyric articulation of grief in order to aquire
recognition and approval for himself:

But when I have done so,
Some man, his art and voice to show,
Doth Set and sing my paine,
And, by delighting many, frees againe
Griewe, which verse did restraine.
To Love, and Grieue tribute of Verse belongs,
But not of such as pleases when 'tis read,
Both are increased by such songs:
For both their triumphs so are published.

(12-20)

Grief and poetry, within this imaginary scenario, open the poet
not only to a mobile, desolating flow of grief within the self, but
also to potentially annihilating, external repetitions of his
"paine." In the expressive solipsism that the poet initially
attributes to lyric creation, verse could, at least in his ambivalent fancies, offer a possibility of "taming" the flood of his sorrow. It could mediate loss, replacing lost specular pleasures with authorial subjectivity. But when written and circulated, poetry evokes a new vexation for the poet: he loses his propriety over both his words and the grief they signify. Unlike love, whose culmination lies in a perfect symmetry of desire, this mirroring of grief by an other results not in the pleasures of recognition but in the heightened anguish of rivalry and a newly mobilized sense of sorrow and loss. Symmetry with an other, the jubilation inherent in Donne's poetry of love, here proves extremely distressing, even galling. Part of the problem for the poet is that the minstrel mimes his articulations of grief without any sharing of affect or desire. The singer does not empathize with or recognize the poet's pain. Like a literal mirror, he simply simulates, without investment, the poet's forms (here verbal). For the poet, however, such mirroring is not entirely free from desire; that is, it is not simply instrumental, motiveless. The minstrel, in the poet's eyes, usurps his poetry not to acknowledge or recognize the poet's experience or artistry but to attain prestige for himself, to display his own skill in "art and voice."12 The minstrel attempts to acquire through his performance a form of recognition which specifically requires the abolition of the poet as authorial presence from the lyric; the minstrel wants the audience to respond to him. Thus, rather than paying homage to the poet's grief by reiterating it, the minstrel
explicitly becomes the poet's rival, a usurper of the poet's self-articulations. Due to this errant, imitative symmetry, the poet and his pain vanish into the minstrel's performance. This is particularly noxious to the poet who sees the rivalrous other not as merely appropriating his words but, in a language which veers strongly towards the incarnational, as setting and singing his "paine" itself. The poet, then, as self-therapist, as a man trying to "fetter" sorrow in verse, is annihiliated in the anticipated performance and circulation of a grief which is no longer properly his. He, as a subject, loses all, even the singularity, the propriety, of his pain.

The introduction of the minstrel figure in the second stanza as a sort of mimetic provocateur serves two purposes for Donne's poet: first, it tends to exculpate poetry itself as a "vexation" of grief, which had been suggested in the first stanza; second, it raises the problem of the fluid transmissability of affect, the ability of sorrow or even delight to flood through an audience, through others, obliterating the propriety of its origin. The minstrel, according to the poet, "by delighting many, frees againe/ Griefe, which verse did restraine." Thus, it is the fault of the minstrel (and oral performance)\textsuperscript{13} that grief overwhelms its poetic structuring. This theme, that singers of poetry have the power to unfetter grief from the constraining grid of reason and language and cause it to flow without restraint through an audience, is at least as old as Plato's \textit{Republic}.\textsuperscript{14} In Plato, however, both poetry itself and its performers are indicted for
inciting potentially overwhelming surges of grief (or other emotions). Donne's poet, in contrast, wishing to retain the belief that writing can fetter sorrow, denounces his imaginary minstrel while asserting that until the minstrel's performance, verse did restrain the flow of his pain. The poet's grief is no longer agitated by "Rimes vexation," but rather by the "delight" registered in its imaginary auditors. It is this delight that "frees" grief both in the poet and the audience. The minstrel's performance unbinds the poet's anguish by creating an alienating (and latently parodic) imitation, an audience-pleasing simulation of the poet's sorrow and loss which neither recognizes its author nor feels his pain. Given this possibility, the poet suggests that verse about love and grief should be restricted to "tribute;" it should be distant, formal, even, perhaps, epideictic. But it should not be "of such as pleases when 'tis read." He does not want his writing of pain to be the source of others' imitative pleasure, of others' implicitly narcissistic simulations. His problem, however, is that he lacks the ability to control the poetic transmissability of grief. Though he blames the imaginary minstrel for eliciting a free circulation of affect, he also tacitly registers that such a performer is not necessary for grief or delight to be released, since poetry can also elicit such responses "when 'tis read." Implicitly, then, it is lyric itself, unless properly constrained in its creation, which generates the superficial, identificatory simulations that provoke the poet's continuing anguish. And in the stronger key of the minstrel's
performance where grief mixes explicitly with pleasure, the transmissability of affect becomes even more objectionable for the poet. The audience, seduced to delight by the minstrel's performance, *enjoys* the lyric evocation of the grief in love. Unlike the poet, they do not imagine a melancholic satisfaction in the submission of verse to prosody; instead, they revel in poetry's ability to incite a circulation of sorrow. Bound to nothing except the joy of a superficial identification without investment or risk, the audience participates in a subjectless carnival of grief, one which knows no objects nor distinctions between pleasure and pain. In some sense, perhaps, they imitate the poet's grief, but without symmetry.

The poet responds to the refractory, indomitable powers of grief which he himself imagines by returning to the self-mocking frame with which the poem began: "And I, which was two fooles, do so grow three;/ Who are a little wise, the best fooles bee" (21-22). The force of affect and loss, rippling through "Rimes vexation," here submits to a distancing gesture of closure. The subject who vanished into the minstrel's song returns as a triple fool, but also as an "I." No longer enmeshed in the matrices of rivalry, simulation, loss and a free (and parodically delightful) circulation of grief, he defines himself through his own cynical autonomy. He has been a fool, he has admitted, "For loving, and for saying so in whining Poetry." And now, to those acts of foolishness, he adds another: having his grief renewed by the very mechanism--verse--that he thought should "tame" it. This
assertion that his love, his grief and his remedies for both are follies suggests a certain detachment which does seem, at least provisionally, to circumscribe and control the flow of affect that he had wished to fetter through prosody. In a sense, in a gesture that recalls Donne's more overt poetic responses to the potential autonomy of woman, the poet sacrifices grief and pain and love for the restricted impregnability of a self-mocking cynicism oriented towards homosocial recognition. By articulating and ridiculing his vulnerability to sorrow and loss, he attempts to use a waggish self-awareness to harrow the field of his grief. Sorrow, in this formulation, can only be controlled by self-derision and sacrifice, by a verbal order which dismisses grief through a sardonic, framing rhetoric of self-abnegation, not through the flattened pleasures of Kristeva's melancholic poetics.

III

Donne, however, does not always use cynicism to redress the grief which permeates his poetics of love. In A Valediction forbidding mourning, Donne creates a poet-figure who attempts to circumscribe the troubling realm of loss and grief through a strategy of denial, renunciation and an audaciously witty evocation of amorous symmetry rather than through cynicism. Unlike The triple Foole, where grief welled up, at least initially, in response to the poet's rejection by his love, in the Valediction grief threatens in anticipation of loss, not in its aftermath. In
addition, the poet's lover, ostensibly ready to melt into weeping when the poem begins, manifests thereby a continuing attachment to the poet. Her desire, in this sense, mirrors his. Consequently, the dream of symmetry that underlies Donne's investments in love has not yet been broken. It remains possible, therefore, for him to envision in the poem an extension of symmetry beyond the realm of physical presence and beyond the interpersonal registers of visual captivation, dialogue and mutual recognition. It also allows his lover and himself to admit absence, which "Dull sublunary lovers" (13) cannot tolerate. The poet thus imagines, in stark contrast to the cynicism of The triple Foole, that verse can fetter grief while in the process of representing it. This power holds, however, only if a form or trace of symmetry can be preserved after the lovers' parting, only if separation does not involve a defection, dissolution or withdrawal of the other's desire and recognition.15

The poet's basic strategy in the Valediction is to sacrifice affect for meaning.16 Grief, which in The triple Foole was transmissible and contagious, flowing from poet to verse to minstrel to audience and thence back to the poet in a vexing circuit of simulation, appears in the Valediction to be subject to the poet's gentle promptings that he and his lover silence their anguish, that they both submit to his desire for affective renunciation:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
T'were prophanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love.
(5-8)

Like the "virtuous men" of the poem's first stanza who, while
lying on their death-beds, "whisper for their soules, to goe" (1-2)
in anticipation of a glorious reunion during the resurrection, the
poet urges that he and his lover engage in an inaudible
dissolution. Together he would have them "melt," which can
mean either to dissolve into tears or to have their bodies
gradually soften and disperse into a more fluxive or immaterial
state. Through this ambiguity, the poet provisionally registers a
desire to weep, a wish for mutual, silent grieving which he
explicitly disavows in the stanza's second line. In a sense, the
poet both acknowledges and then immediately censors the threat
of annihilation in separation. Melting, he indicates, must not
include the implicitly chaotic mobilization of grief in "teare-
floods" or sigh-tempests." The joys that he and his mistress
share in their love should not be "prophaned" by such an
evanescent bodily dissemination, by a proclamation of their love
which speaks and enacts its pending dissolution. Instead, he
intimates that their dissipation should follow the example of
souls which melt away from their bodies at the moment of
expiration into a sacred realm beyond loss. In the silence of
symmetrical melting, their love can mime the dissolution
through which the soul sheds its materiality. And by sacrificing
the affective language of grief, they can guard their love from a
profane telling, from an articulation that would submit it to the
impious scrutiny of "the layetie." Their love, when restricted to
the unmediated mutuality and "joyes" of shared desire, can, in the
poet's fantasy, transcend the pain and absence of separation; it
apparently cannot survive, however, the desecrating gaze of
others.\(^{18}\)

The poet, then, not only seeks to deny grief, but also hopes to
prevent the profanation of his imaginary, binary love by his or his
lover's fall into the language of tears and the consequent opening
of their coupling to the withering gaze of a third party—to a
form of triangulation.\(^{19}\) The poet seems to fear that the ability
of their love to mime the restorative power of the sacred
depends on veiling it from those who would see it differently—
according to asymmetrical formulations of desire, cognition and
faith. The metaphysical power of silent, mutual dissolution
which the poet offers his lover as an alternative to the chaos of
weeping would be defiled and undone by the invasive disbelief of
others. Apparently, the poet's suggestion of a recuperation of
presence beyond separation depends on the couple's ability to
cloister their love in the mute, fluid sanctuary of shared desire.

The power of such shared desire surfaces more explicitly a
couple of stanzas later when the poet seeks to explain to his
mistress why absence can despoil the love of others and not
bereave theirs:

\begin{center}
Dull sublunary lovers love
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
\end{center}
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

But we by'a love so much refin'd,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.
(13-20)

For lovers "whose soule is sense," a trope indicating their enmeshment in corporeal experience, absence is intolerable. In their sublunary "dullness" (slowness of understanding, lack of wit, stupidity, listlessness\(^{20}\)), they have no power to prevent absence from evacuating their love of those implicitly physical things which "elemented it." Ontologically rooted in sensation, such lovers lack the ability to accommodate separation within a form of attachment that would extend beyond bodily gratifications and assurances. The poet, however, imagines no such somatic essence for his and his mistress's desire. "Refin'd" by a love whose amorous alchemy surpasses knowledge and representation, they require no physical tokens to sustain their mutual devotion. Instead, their love is ensured by an inscrutable "telepathic" symmetry ("Inter-assured of mind") in which all that is known (or imagined) is the likeness of the other's desire.

Through the imaginary efficacy of this symmetry of minds, the poet concludes that he and his lover share an identity which can surmount the pains of their pending separation:

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinness beate.

(21-24)

In spite of the lingering duality of the lovers ("Our two soules"), the "inter-assurance" of their minds establishes a basis through which they can momentarily become one. For a brief, chimeric interval in which the poet's fancy becomes the material of their love, they can infinitely expand the contours of their being and transcend the "breach" of parting. As Murray Roston has pointed out, however, the term "yet" registers the poet's own sense of the ephemeral quality of that transcendance\(^21\) (it endures only for as long as the lovers can remain entranced with the poet's ingenious attempts to suspend the trauma of separation). As in *Image of her whom I love* where the poet imagines "if I dreame I have you, I have you,/ For, all our joyes are but fantasticall,/ And so I scape the paine, for paine is true" (13-15), the poet here self-consciously attempts to conjure for his lover and himself a dream-like lull in the real in which the recuperative joys of poetic fantasy temporarily displace anticipated loss and misery. The simile that the lovers' souls can expand with the miraculous malleability of gold thus is not a solution to the problem of separation but rather, even in the poet's own eyes, a strategic deferral. Though the lovers have not yet experienced a breach in their love, their symmetry, they also have not *yet* parted. But as the poet implicitly recognizes, they must and they will.
The poet's comprehension that his and his mistress's love lacks the fantastic malleability necessary to transcend the abyss of separation leads him to develop in the poem's final three stanzas a figure in which desiring symmetry anchored by his lover replaces psychic identity as a means of mediating the threatened pain of physical divorce:

If they be two, they are two so
   As stiffe twin compasses are two.
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
   To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,
   Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leanes, and hearkens after it,
   And growes erect as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
   Like th'other foot, obliquely runne.
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
   And makes me end, where I begunne.

(25-36)

The poet begins in a subjunctive mood, tentatively but irrevocably abandoning his prior, temporally limited articulation of the loving unity of souls. Instead, through the audacious (and now notorious) figure of a compass, he strives to imagine an amorous duality which can endure lasting separation. The poet uses the compass image to indicate that although the lovers are each singular, non-identical beings, they remain intimately, symmetrically related. They are different, plural, but part of a mechanical structure which articulates their conjugate
movement. He emphasizes this synchronous duality through his pluralization of the term "compass" in line 26. The compass itself is not a unified instrument, but pluralized by its "stiffe twin" feet. 22 Like the lovers who are "inter- assured of the mind" even during bodily separation, the feet of the compass each possess their own rigid materiality, yet because they are joined at their apex (a sort of "head"), their form and movement always remains symmetrical--"twin." For the poet, the lovers' symmetry depends on the responsiveness and attunement of his mistress whom he imagines as the "fixt foot" of the compass. Her desire, according to his conceit, is passive and specular; she moves only in mechanical responsiveness to him. She remains still when he is still and moves only "if th'other doe." Thus, even if he stretches outward in separation, she will continue to "reflect" him and respond to him. Parting, consequently, will not end recognition; even during the poet's "oblique" wanderings, his lover will incline herself to his movement.

Through the compass, the poet articulates his lover as corresponding precisely to his fantasy of having an other who perfectly mirrors him. Unlike the unbridled and potentially libertine women of poems such as A Valediction of my name, in a window or The Apparition, she sits contentedly "in the center" until "the other far doth rome," and then, prompted by her own desire, "leanes, and hearkens after" him. Even though, as Avi Erlich has pointed out, the poet's roaming suggests at least a possibility of male licentiousness during the lovers'
separation, the mechanized desire and movement of the woman minimizes any fear by the poet of her potential for infidelity. She, through the perfect symmetry of her inclinations, provides an imaginary structure which accommodates his wandering while allaying the possibility of hers. And as if to emphasize her sexual fidelity, the poet imagines her, through the compass analogy, as growing "erect" only when he returns home. Having remained true to her "center," sexual arousal becomes for her an act of desiring symmetry. Though the poet's syntax emphasizes that her amorous posture is an active response to his return, it remains guided by the behavior of the wandering foot itself, which also implicitly "grows erect" as it returns. Her erotic inclination thus precisely matches his, reflecting his desire that her specular relation to him extend even to the sexual realm. As the compass's "fixt foot," she serves the poet as a perfect female double—symmetrical, responsive and rigidly centered during separation, and sexually aroused only in concert with his own phallic rising during his return.

In his effort, then, to stem the flow of grief mobilized by his impending departure, the poet moves slowly but inexorably away from the joyous, cloistered devotion and psychic reciprocity that he had initially articulated as a means to displace his lover's sorrow. Though he begins the poem with the fiction that he needs to address and forbid her grief, he finishes by attending not to her anguish but to his own. Through the conceit of the compass, he vests his lover with a kinetic, reactive constancy that allows
him to see her, in spite of separation, as responding symmetrically to his desire. Even though he must "obliquely runne" into the world without her, he hopes to ensure that she will continually accomodate herself to his motion, and incline after him according to her desire; she will, he fancies, remain reflecting if not present. Thus, he imagines that his seemingly estranged wandering will be compassed, literally, by her "firmnes" which will make his "circle just." Even in separation, he will have his own motion curved into a semblance of symmetry by the pull of his lover's continuing love and recognition. She, beyond absence, will retain a mesmerizing semblance of presence that will overlay his loss and defend against grief.

As the stabilizing figure in a structure of mutual inclination, the woman exerts a specular, almost gravitational force on the poet. In his words, she compels him to return to his origin (she "makes me end, where I begun"), inducing him to plot a course in which loving symmetry is not destroyed or led astray by the worldly exigencies (money, ambition, politics, sexual license) that require the poet, like other men, to "rome." Through his lover's imaginary "firmnes," the poet's love can follow what turns out to be a perfectly regressive course, returning with mathematical precision to its joyous beginnings. His mistress's responsive, desiring stability thus becomes for the poet a captivating mediation of the losses imposed by his necessary "runne" into the world. As he imagines their future separation,
the poet needs to see his lover in such a stable, reliable form. Consequently, at the beginning of the poem's final stanza, he attempts rather forwardly to thrust this role upon her: "Such wilt thou be to mee . . . ." He assumes, it would seem, that she will want to serve as his "fixt foot," as a "stiffe, twin" repetition of his desire. His more pressing concern in his use of the future imperative, however, is simply to ensure that she does become for him such a figure. As a result, even though his rhetoric remains in the form of an imaginary dialogue throughout his elaboration of the compass analogy, it assumes an increasingly monologic cast. His hope is that his future imperative possesses the force to perform an imaginary transfiguration of the other to language. As a verbal form, as the "stiffe twin" foot of the compass, the woman will necessarily participate in and submit to the poet's aestheticized denial (remediation) of grief. And because he does not simply turn her into a verbal artifact, into an inert memorial, but allows her to remain actively sympathetic, he imagines that he can effectively forbid his own mourning. "Fixt" but inclining, firm but specular, the woman as figure retains a kinetic responsiveness that keeps her conversion to language from being merely aesthetic or commemorative. In her imaginary, reactive inclinations, she is never fully absent, never dead, never simply embalmed in the archives of memory. Instead, she serves to perpetuate and sustain the poet's continuing remediation against
grief: the dream of a symmetrical relation with his lover, one whose traces can persist in spite of separation.

The poet, then, attempts to compass both his lover and grief within a verbal formation that acknowledges no absolute difference between presence and separation. When, in the poem's final lines, the poet asserts that his lover's "firmnes makes my circle just,/ And makes me end where I begunne," he casually effaces the distinction between circular and centripetal motion. On the one hand, the woman's "firmnes" balances the centrifugal thrust of separation, drawing their relation into the perfect symmetry of circular motion around a fixed point. On the other hand, her firmness also makes the poet end where he began, a much more ambiguous movement. Either the poet recurs to his starting point on the circumference of a now completed circle or, in concert with the previous stanza's image of the woman growing erect as her lover returns home, he returns to her physical presence. Within the figural symmetry traced by the compass, absence and presence appear to share the same verbal space--they syntactically coincide. And because bereavement stems from an ability to make distinctions (linguistic, psychic or ontological) between presence and absence and to vest those distinctions with meaning, this concurrence undermines and veils grief's cognitive moorings. In a sense, the poet "forbids" his own mourning by undoing the latent semiotic grid which translates change and discontinuity and flux into loss. By assimilating the other within a figure that sustains mirroring and connectedness
even in separation and which sketches a convergence of presence and absence, he suspends the power of the other to produce grief. In his fantasy, she can only engender relationality, not privation. Thus, in spite of the poem's title, the poet does not simply submit grief to the constraining rigors of binding verbal forms; he does not simply forbid mourning. Instead, he imagines and articulates a realm in which his lover's desiring inclinations stretch mechanically yet responsively across a psychic topography marked by separation and absence in order to hold him within the symmetry of an assured, continuing love. Instead, he imagines a realm in which symmetry effaces the trauma of separation, and verbal transfiguration denies the forbidden melancholy of loss.

IV

Donne's desire to construct and evoke a figure of loving, kinetic symmetry, however, does not always serve to constrain or preempt the threatening and potentially annihilating fluidity of grief. By imagining the trauma of loss through the mediating structure of poetic iteration, the poet of *A Valediction forbidding mourning* attempts to use language as an instrument of displacement and denial, hoping to translate anticipated loss into a figure of continuing relationality, and thereby forestall grief by eliminating its source. But, paradoxically, the poet can only transfigure his pending absence from his lover by focusing on it, reiterating it, in a sense, by vexing it. The very
renunciation of loss thus entails an anticipation of it which agitates as well as consoles. Grief, then, even as it is mediated, must be denied if it is to be controlled. Consequently, in the poem, the poet's attempt to redress loss with the mediating figure of the compass requires the poet's prior gesture of denial in order that the trope itself, in its involved (and repressed) acknowledgement of a form of separation, not invoke unwittingly a mobilization of sorrow. It is only by the force of such denial that poetics and poetry can be made to stand in opposition to grief. As *The triple Foole* had suggested, without such a denial, poetry can only become grief's plaintive but animating partner.

In *A Valediction of weeping*, *A Valediction forbidding mourning*'s turbulent, bereaved double, neither specular fantasy nor the abridgement and reconstruction of the real in tropes of mapping can arrest what becomes for the poet a murderous flow of sorrow. In fact, in concert with *The triple Foole*, the poem intimates that the relationship between poetry, representation, recognition and consolation is itself fluid, vexing and open to dissolution. The reason for this is twofold: first, within the poem, grief is transmissible, highly mobile, and incites imitation, and therefore tends to intensify when instigated within the reflecting duality of twinned lovers; second, without a preemptive renunciation of grief, the aesthetic conversion of affect to images (iconic or semiological) becomes unstable, even perishable, as the poet imagines a rising tide of affect and weeping dissolving the mirror of his tears. In the imitative
sympathy and attunement of the lovers, any dissemination of
grief (even, and perhaps especially, in the emblematic form of
tears) renders each lover vulnerable to the flow of affect arising
in the other, a flow exacerbated by the poet's ineffectual
attempts to accommodate his and his lover's pending separation
through mediating conceits. Within this mimetic conundrum of
sorrow, there is nothing to compass grief.

The poem begins with a gesture radically opposed to the
renunciation of grief and tears which opened A Valediction
forbidding mourning. Donne's poet-figure, rather than seeking to
suppress his lover's (and perhaps his own) dissolution into
"teare-floods" and "sigh-tempests," implores her to license his
weeping:

    Let me powre forth
    My teares before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare,
And by this Mintage they are something worth,
    For thus they bee
Pregnant of thee;
Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more,
When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore,
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse shore.

(1-9)

Initially, as if responding to a request by his lover to restrain his
grief, the poet attempts to vest his tears with imaginary power-
an ability to confer on both his lover and himself an almost
imperial sense of subjectivity. In his case, even though he
seeks his lover's warrant for his tears, he simultaneously would
endow the act of weeping (through the convergence of the verbs "pour" and "power" in the spelling "powre"27) with a certain self-authorizing force. As someone who "powers" forth tears before his lover's face, he self-consciously creates the medium that allows and authorizes her ability to "coin" them, to mime royal prerogative. It is the subjectivizing force of his tears that compels his lover to "stamp" them as ephemeral transitional objects, that is, as objects which should serve, ideally, to mediate the loss of an other during the other's absence.28 Thus, weeping, like poetic creation itself, allows the poet to imagine a medium through which he can temporarily appropriate and represent the other's form. For the woman, the poet's outpouring of tears provides a formless surface on which she can impress her image. Like the face of a queen, her visage, according to the poet, has the power to transform base material into currency. Through their reflection of her, the tears acquire her imprimatur, her authorization, and therefore "are something worth."

This worth, however, as the stanza proceeds, is undermined by the fluid inconstancy of the tears themselves. Though "pregnant" with the image of the woman, they finally bear nothing except more grief of which they are both "fruits" and "emblemes." In this strange womb of tears, the dissolving power of sorrow asserts its primacy over two different means of controlling change and temporality: representation and insemination/childbearing, both of which are modes of
reproduction, asserting the preservation and continuance of a form of the Same over time. Representation accomplishes this preservation by converting aspects of the real into a repeatable form, by "coining" them. Similarly, pregnancy, a synecdoche for the entire process of childbearing, suggests a preservation of the Same by the creation of a biological heritage--children--which reflects its parents. The poet's attempt to invoke coining and pregnancy to vest his tears with value fails, however, because both of these means to control the pending loss of the other miscarry in the abject process of grieving: "When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore . . . ."° William Empson, commenting on this line, asserts that "the word fall expects unfaithfulness," a suggestion reinforced by the aural resonance between "falls" and "false."° For the poet, separation inevitably if latently involves the fall of the other: as the poet's tears fall, the woman analogously falls too. Though there is a sense in which Donne's poet limits this fall to the lover's image in his tear--only "that thou falls"--even this circumscribed fall is annihilating: "So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse shore." In the rising abjection of weeping, there is and apparently can be no symbolic mediation of separation. The only material to hold the trace of the other is tears, and they themselves are fluid, evanescent and manifest only in their self-obliterating discharge.

The fall which the poet laments, however, goes beyond hinting at a latent, potentially annihilating, mistrust of his lover. More
pointedly, the lover's "fall" (the fall of her as a figure giving
form to the poet's mobilization of grief) results precisely from
the very means through which the poet imagines extending her
worth--representation. By portraying his lover as a queenly
presence who coins his tears, the poet vests her with the
authorial power to arrest the transient simulations of mirroring
within the more permanent formalizations produced by coining.
Though the poet's tears, in their mercurial fluidity, can only
accommodate a succession of visual images--reflections--the
poet initially sees the tears as being stable (metallic) enough to
allow her to stamp them with her image. They become, in a
sense, vehicles for inscription, commemorative tokens which
acquire value only through the representation they bear. The
poet, however, remains manifestly ambivalent towards these
"coins." On the one hand, he says that as an imaginary currency
they are only "something" worth, specifically avoiding any
extravagant or even sanguine appraisal of their recuperative
efficacy. Though they bear the woman's image, the exchange
value they secure thereby is limited. As a currency of mourning
and preservation, they are debased--they are neither cathartic
nor agents of sublimation. On the other hand, the poet
immediately replaces the language of "coining" with a rhetoric of
"pregnancy" and "fruits," a rhetoric which imagines the
reproduction of the other through a metaphorics of gestation and
regeneration: tears become a site of fecundity rather than iconic
repetition.32 As impregnated wombs rather than coins, the poet's
tears hold out a potential for future relations, for parturition, rather than suggesting a language of exchange or substitution as did the tropes of minting. However, even as wombs inseminated with the other or bearing the other's imaginary presence, the tears produce nothing but knowledge of an inevitable escalation of grief ("Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more").

In this production of knowledge and anguish, tears lose their organic fecundity and again become iconic repetitions (emblems) now representing grief itself. Even before the poet's actual separation from his lover, the representations and reproductions he imagines her as producing "fall" precisely because they are representations, emblems, simulations. Tears, as mirrors, as coins, as wombs, fall because they cannot reproduce presence or sustain recognition. Even when they remain in the proximity of their origin ("before thy face"), the tear-figures remain volatile and evanescent since the prospect of separation is from the very beginning of the poem more forcefully present than the lover herself. Though the tears initially seem to offer, within the alembic of the poet's wit, the promise of a reproduction of the other that can at least partially allay the anguish of separation, they actually accomplish nothing. Instead, they foreshadow and enact an incessant, vexing fall—from the twinning of eyes to an abject flood of tears; from a present other to debased simulations; from the imaginary plenitude of loving contact to the anguish of an unremediable separation; from recognized subjectivity to annihilation ("So thou and I are nothing then,
when on a divers shore). The poet's fantasies of mimesis, then, which are at least provisionally "something worth," dissolve in an outflow of tears which voids the consoling potential of representation. It is "that thou," the thou conceived and annihilated by its descent into representations, which falls with each tear, and which obliterates both the poetic subject and his other in that abject descent.

The poet, however, does not abandon the possibility that certain powers of representation might surmount the desolating force of grief. Though his lover's ability to coin and procreate finally produces nothing (no mediational surrogates, no commemorative traces) to mitigate the annihilating forces of separation, the poet imagines, at least momentarily, that slightly different representational strategies and powers can produce a simulation of the other which will overlay the nought of his tears:

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

(10-18)

In contrast to the annihilation of self and other that ended stanza one, the poet begins this stanza by imagining that each tear of
his which acquires his lover's "impression" will become, thereby, a self-sufficient, autonomous sphere—a world. Like the "workeman" who can map various continents onto a "round ball" and "make that, which was nothing, All," the poet asserts that through an analogous power of representation his lover's image can fashion the empty bubbles of his tears into microcosmic copies of the world itself. Though the lover's image never becomes more than a representation (it is only an appearance which the tear "wears"), it nevertheless seems to possess, at least in the poet's rhetoric, an almost demiurgic power to suppress loss. As the poet's tears reflect his lover, passively assuming her form, they become a "globe," then a "world." In this subtle slippage from "globe" to "world," the poet effaces the conventional distinction between a representation and its "original." In his rhetoric of tears, the figures that the poet conjures (through his lover's reflection) are not simply mimetic replicas, "globes," but the substance of an alternative realm in which imaginary figures constitute the real. Implicit in this revision of the relation between representation and its models is an empowerment of the mimetic artisan (be he cartographer or poet) who possesses the ability to fashion worlds which can supplant the given. For the poet, the mapping of his lover's reflection onto his tear provides an alternative to the realm of his grief, an alternative in which the vacuity of his tears is colonized by the lover's form. Under the demiurgic artisanry of the poet, the lover's reflection gives form to the potentially
dissolving chaos of his tears; they become a world-generating speculum rather than emblems of an annihilating fall.

But even though the poet can generate a world through the impress of his lover's reflection, this imaginary power cannot arrest the flow of affect induced by the lovers' anticipation of separation. The poet's attempt to submit his tears (and their implicit threat of annihilation) to the powers of representation lasts only until until he recognizes and is undone by his lover's weeping, only "Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow/ This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so." Grief, it seems, follows its own logic of simulation and refuses to be tamed by the poet's strategies. As the poet strives to have his lover's image transform from fluxive ciphers into a world whose essence is reflection, his lover's grief begins to flow explicitly, creating a surge of affect that floods the poet's figural world with a deluge of sorrow he cannot restrain or control. The specular microcosm his tears have become dissolves under this surge, annihilating the imaginary "heaven" he had created through his poetic art. Symmetry, the basic structure of love for Donne, becomes, in the affective turmoil of separation and grief, potentially annihilating. As the poet's lover becomes like him, as she grieves, she exerts a mimetic power over the poet: the waters sent from her produce a corresponding (imitative) rise in the poet's misery. Physically, her anguish produces a flow of tears which mixes with and overruns the poet's "global" teardrops, dissolving the representational forms through which
he had adorned (and transfigured) his sorrow. The asymmetry that the poet had established between his lover and himself to preserve identities and boundaries (I weep, she coins; I imagine and articulate her strategies of representation, she reproduces herself through my tears; I represent her, she represents herself through my representations) also vanishes in this rising flux, overwhelmed by a destructive symmetry of weeping. Through her tears, the woman, in the poet’s eyes, gives rise to an escalating and seemingly overwhelming interanimation of affect. Because her grief is mobile, transmissible and manifest, it mixes with his tears, supplements them, inundates them, swells them into a flood. In the destructive contagion of their now mutual grief, the lovers weep away the world, seemingly caught in a process of affective mirroring and susceptibility that threatens to destroy all.

For the poet, however, the responsibility for this potentially annihilating symmetry of weeping is not equal. It is the woman who sends the waters which obliterate the figural world of the poet’s tears. And it is she, he imagines, who induces the specular interanimation of grief which he cannot control and which dissolves the "world" of his teardrops. Consequently, in the poem’s final stanza, it is the woman who must attend to and salve the poet’s vulnerability to grief by consciously restraining the affective power of her tears; it is she who must keep their mutual responsiveness, their grief-stricken love, from becoming deadly:
O more than Moone,
Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy sphere,
Weepe me not dead, in thine armes, but forbeare
To teach the sea, what it may doe too soone;
   Let no the winde
   Example finde,
To doe me more harme, then it purposeth;
Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath,
Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hast the others
death.

(19-27)

The stanza begins in an extraordinary moment of ambivalence.
The lover, identified as "more than Moone," elicits a powerful
lyric energy from the poet. In spite of her tears, in spite of her
possible "fall" during their separation, she still exerts, in the
hyperbolic rhetoric of his love, a celestial influence over him;
she is still enthralling. Yet, as the stanza progresses, the poet's
interest in her supralunary powers reveals itself as more fearful
than desiring. For as "more than Moone," the woman has the
gravitational pull to mobilize, intensify and aggravate the
fluidity of the poet's sorrow. She can, unless she chooses to
forbear, draw up seas of grief to drown the poet in her "spheare."
James Baumlins identifies this sphere as either the woman's eye
or her tear, "a second globe reflecting the poet's image" (a double
of the poet's image-adorned tears in the previous stanza).36 In
this reading, the woman's power to weep, if indulged, can
submerge and destroy any possible "mirrors" she has created for
the poet. If she continues to weep, to double his tears, she
ironically will destroy any possibility she has of reflecting his image. Her eyes, in the rising tide of her grief, can only drown the other's specular image imagined as residing there; they cannot reproduce the hypnotic reflections that frequently appear, as in *The good-morrow*, to indicate the mirroring of self and desire in love. Paradoxically, for the poet, the symmetry (sympathy) constituted between himself and his lover through their mutual tears obliterates the possibility of him seeing her as the mirror he desires, as an other-myself. In the threatening mobility of her grief, the poet imagines no possibility of pleasurable symmetry. His lover, in her flooded sphere, can provide no speculum for his wish to see himself in and through his lover's eyes.

The woman's "spheare," however, consists of more than either her tears or her eyes alone. It is also the domain in which she can exert her influence over the poet and his grief. In that sphere, it is the poet-figure's own affect, his own tears, perhaps, which the woman can draw up with her lunar power. As "more than Moone," she possesses the power to "drown" the poet if she so chooses because she can mobilize the dangerous fluidity of his own sorrow. Within her sphere, according to the poet, there is nothing to hinder the rise of his grief except for her will. It is *her* choice whether to indulge in grief or to accede to the poet's entreaties that she refrain. It is no surprise that within this sphere in which the woman and affective tumult rule, symmetry becomes explicitly threatening. First, in a sort of magical
projection, the poet fears that his lover's crying might be imitated by the sea itself, which would appropriate from her "teaching" a desire to drown the poet. Similarly, the wind could find in her a destructive "example," a paradigm to augment its own malignant purpose. In both cases, the poet fears that nature, like himself, will prove susceptible to a desire to imitate the woman in her grief. He also fears that any symmetry between the woman's grieving and the sea he anticipates crossing which might result from this mimetic susceptibility will prove deadly. But this fear of symmetry is merely a preface to a more tricky problem: that the very interanimation of the self and other in love creates, in the sphere of grief, a dynamism of death: "Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath,/ Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hast the others death." In the murderous exchange of sighs, symmetry itself is cruel, and becomes even more cruel when one of the partners increases his or her indulgence in grief. Though couched in a language of equality (either partner has the same potential to cause a deadly escalation of sorrow), the couplet tacitly registers the poet's fear that in the destructive symmetry of their grief, the woman has the power to establish a lead which he must follow even to his own destruction. The closing couplet is the poet's final attempt to convince his lover to restrain her manifestations of affect, to return to a symmetry that is not destructive. *His* weeping, by itself, has not been a problem. It is *her* tears which have provoked in him a desolating, imitative response; it is *her* tears which are
threateningly transmissable, causing the dissolution of the "heaven" he had conjured from his own tears; it is her tears which must be controlled if the poet is to control his own. As A Valediction forbidding mourning suggested, symmetry can be reparative if grief itself, and the affective mobility that it produces, can be renounced--fettered or displaced by verbal injunctions. But when grief and its visible signs cannot be effectively forbidden, when grief is mobile, licensed, flowing, open to transmission and imitation, the very structure of love itself for Donne (the desire for symmetry with and recognition by the other) becomes self-destructive. In the fluid tumult of grief, love seems to become a haunted by dissolution and death, and expiration looms as the strange, annihilating outcome of interanimating symmetry.

V

In A Valediction of weeping, grief is immediate, overwhelming, transmissable, and potentially deadly. Its vexing fluidity continually proves resistant, as Barbara Estrin has suggested, to the "solace of art." As in The triple Foole, neither the grid of prosody nor reparative strategies of representation can still or displace the discomposing flow of affect generated by anticipated or remembered loss. Unless consciously suppressed as in A Valediction forbidding mourning, grief appears in these poems to be agitated by verbalization itself. Grief, in its very articulation, seems to initiate a
possibility of reproduction in which the mimetic force of tears and weeping induces a sympathy which threatens to agitate and perhaps to dissolve the poetic subject. Donne's poet-figures seem acutely vulnerable to this force, utterly susceptible to manifestations of the other's sorrow, to the other's reiterations and repetitions of the poet-figures' own sorrow, and finally to the emblems, the imitative desires, the simulations and the outpourings which transmit both. Like a wild, dark double of love itself, grief rises through a language of symmetry, sympathy and emotional mirroring. Unlike love, however, in grief that language, even though it remains audacious, witty, and perhaps even seductive, is overtly marked with loss, bearing within it unexpungible signs and threats of potential annihilation. Throughout Donne's poems of escalating grief, this mark vexes all, evacuating representation as a strategy of recuperation while producing a threatening surge of sorrow. For Donne, it is affect, not language, which threatens to displace and replace the other after separation. Through this displacement, symmetry with the other, rather than sustaining the poetic subject, becomes an unsuspected author of dissolution, an agitating speculum of death.

The problems that symmetry between the self and other poses when refracted through the dark glass of loss appears even in *A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day*, *Being the shortest day*, Donne's most desolate poem of love and loss. In this poem, melancholy and mortification have overtaken grief, and affect itself has died
along with the poet's lover. The poet, through these deaths, imagines himself as an incarnation of emptiness, of voidance, a spectral voice who speaks from the absolute nothingness of irreparable privation. He begins to articulate this sense of deadness in the poem's opening stanza:

Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes;
The worlds whole sap is sunke:
The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seeme to laugh,
Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

(1-9)

Nature, in concord with the solar year, has sunk into a cadaverous hibernation and languishes from the dessicating action of the earth itself and from a pervasive and deadly withdrawal of vitalizing moisture. In a precise inversion of A Valediction of weeping, the problem here is not too much fluid but too little. "The general balme," which John Carey identifies as "the vital, life-preserving essence" thought by Paracelsus to inhere in all living bodies, has been sucked away, leaving behind a global dessication.\(^{39}\) Like a person on a death-bed whose animating fluids ("life") have shrunk to his or her feet, the world itself, emptied of its "sap," lies "Dead and enterr'd." All life, all fluidity, stagnates or dissipates as "Lucie" (the day) recedes behind the mask of a withering, solstitial darkness. The poet,
however, is not himself part of this general consumption. Though
the world has reached its nadir, it remains different from the
poet. It has become a corpse, a dead body, its vivifying essence
having shrunk away with the sun. He, in contrast, has become an
epitaph, a dead bit of language rather than a corpse. As such, he
has no "natural" body, no substance; he is nothing but an array of
letters, a marker of death. Unlike the natural world, which in its
appearance of laughter retains the possibility of affect, of
vitality, the poet imagines himself as evacuated of everything
but this signifying function. For him, death is all; there is no
possibility of restoration.

The poet emphasizes his divergence from the regenerative arc
of the natural world more explicitly in the poem's second stanza
in which he contrasts his own consuming emptiness with the
blossoming of love in others in the spring. More significant than
this contrast, however, is the poet's change in the way in which
he imagines himself. In the first stanza, he had presented
himself as an epitaph, the signifying mark of the world's
consumption. In the second stanza, he becomes, instead, a sort of
negative exemplum, a figure who demands to be studied (in some
sense read) in order that others may recognize his singularity.
The focus of the poem shifts from the world to the self, and the
poet's own significance as a "figure" of voidance assumes
prominence:

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
   In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
   For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
   From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.
   (10-18)

In contrast to the poem's opening stanza, the poet here both amplifies and evacuates himself as the salient record of love's "Alchimie." No longer reduced to a chain of dead letters, an inscription of death, the poet has become, explicitly and ambivalently, a desiring (though still written) subject. He has re-imagined himself not as an epitaph but as a significant voice negotiating the subtle melancholic tension between self-exemplification and self-abnegation. Initially, the poet sees himself and implores others to read him as a sort of primer of love, a verbal model which future lovers should study and understand but not copy. The poet's desire here is twofold: he wants others to recognize his desolation and reflect on what the poet conceives of as the paradigmatic power of his own voidance by love; he also wishes, it seems, to emphasize the archetypal singularity of his desolation both by aggrandizing it and, implicitly, by warning others not to produce a destructive symmetry (identification) with him. In a sense, he desires recognition without identification, availing himself of a certain amount of prestige through the imaginary, sympathetic gaze of others while trying to circumscribe any possible transmission,
circulation, or reproduction of his desolation by them. For those who shall respond to vernal promptings and become lovers "At the next world, that is, at the next Spring," he thus will become, if they read him properly, a sort of premonitory figure who discloses the dark possibility of a complete inversion of their anticipated joy. He, like them, has been (will have been) "re-begot" through love, but his rebirth consists only "Of absence, darknesse, death," manifestations of absolute loss or negation rather than the lusty couplings of springtime.

For the poet, there is a certain depressive relish in this melancholic rebirth. Early in the stanza, the poet, with a flourish of morbid grandiosity, identifies himself as "every dead thing,/ In whom love wrought new Alchimie." He is, in his exemplary desolation, an all-incorporating amalgamation of all the deaths produced by the ruinous alchemy of love. Similarly, in spite of his evacuation by "privations" and "emptinesse," in spite even of his "nothingnesse," he emerges as a "quintessence," an extract which functions as an exemplar. This rhetoric of paradigmatic abnegation or desolation has affinities with what Geoffrey Galt Harpham has identified as the language of eremitic asceticism. Harpham has noticed that many of the writings which comprise the hagiographical tradition beginning with Athansius' The Life of Anthony respond to a fundamental tension: on the one hand, they usually narrate a desire to mortify the self, to stamp out the body and the carnal will; on the other hand, they exalt that mortified self, raising it, even in its supposed selfless
desire for abasement, to exemplary or heroic status. Donne's poet modifies that tension significantly: for him, it is an evacuation of the self, rather than a willed mortification, which confers exemplary status because it is loss instead of temptation which induces the poet's rhetorical self-interest; in addition, this evacuated self is articulated not as a model for others but as a subject (or voice) desiring recognition. In the melancholic desert of St. Lucies day, the poet dramatically works this tension, fixing the rhetoric of desolation and subjectivity in conflicted alliance, preserving an eviscerated but paradoxically masterful version of himself.

The poet's "ascetic" rhetoric serves him in three ways. First, it allows him, momentarily, to mortify affect which so often loads the language of loss in Donne's poetry. Second, it allows him to formulate and display his abasement by love and privation rather than being totally annihilated by it. Through this display he vests his "nothingnesse" with a residue of narcissistic value. Third, by presenting his desolation as an archetypal condition, he allows himself, again momentarily, to suppress the vexing power possessed by the other which surfaces in loss. It is significant, in this regard, that there is no reference to a specific other in the first two stanzas. The poet has been "ruin'd" by love, but he does not reveal by whom or in what way. Through his rhetoric of exemplary abnegation, then, he magnifies his own power as a subject at the expense of the other. In this way he forestalls the language of grief.
The poet's subtle displacement of the loss of the other with a language of self-nihilation, however, is only a deferral of the other's vexing power to captivate his interest. In the poem's pivotal third stanza, the poet begins with a reiteration of his own voidance by love, but suddenly shifts into an affect laden reminiscence of his and his lover's destructive symmetries:

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,  
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they seeeing have;  
I, by loves limbecke, am the grave  
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood  
Have wee two wept, and so  
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow  
To be two Chaosses, when we did show  
Care to ought else; and often absences  
Withdrawd our soules, and made us carcasses.  
(19-27)

The change from melancholic self-articulation to grieving reflection is remarkably abrupt. The ceasura in the middle of line 22 which separates the poet's all-encompassing nothingness from his and his lover's mutual flood of tears seems to divide two entirely different domains of loss as well. The first domain, articulated before the ceasura, is the "ascetic" realm in which the poetic subject constructs himself from a language which iterates and reiterates desolation while simultaneously mortifying affect. Though there is a hint of flow in this domain in the ability of "all others" to "draw" or siphon off "from all things . . . all that's good," the poet, as "love's limbecke," does not participate in this eduction of essence and goodness. Instead, he
imagines himself as dramatically isolated (note the prominence of "I" at the beginning of line 21) but lacking in being. Through the alembic of love, he has become a grave, an evacuated form which holds and transmutes "nothing." In this melancholic domain, such dramatic negations of the self take the place of the dynamics of grief, and the (as yet unstated) loss of the other registers only as a radical loss of self.

The second domain, which follows the ceasura, differs profusely from the first. The most salient difference is that in this second domain of loss, the other is explicitly acknowledged (and perhaps even addressed). Loss itself is not interred in or displaced by a depressive rhetoric of self-nihilation. Instead, as in A Valediction of weeping, the poet interweaves loss, affect and symmetry into a language of potentially annihilating misery. From the vantage point of reminiscence, the poet recalls his and his lover's oft repeated, symmetrical responses to partings and separations. His focus is threefold. First, he foregrounds the primal, annihilating power of grief. In a language that subtly recalls the early chapters of Genesis, the poet associates grief with the destruction of the world by flood and with an agitating regression to chaos. The anticipated or actual breakdown of desiring symmetry through separation or "Care to ought else" generates, according to the poet, the devastating symmetry of mutual loss. The lovers either drown together in grief, disintegrate into twin "Chaosses" through a lack of recognition from the beloved other, or become dual "carcasses" through
separation. Second, the poet emphasizes the pervasive influence of symmetry on the behavior of the lovers, structuring even their response to loss or slights. When inundated by the agitating mobility of grief or the ruin of separation, the lovers continue to mirror each other. Annihilating grief, chaos or absence apparently can only partially interfere with the specular relations coupling the lovers. Even the severance of present relations between them paradoxically preserves (and in some sense provokes) a version of symmetry. The lovers' specular choreography persists (even if only in a destructive form) in spite of the potential or real loss of the other. Parting, then, according to the poet, transforms but does not destroy symmetry. Third, the poet emphasizes the power of mirroring to preserve a relation between his lover and himself in spite of internal and external threats. In the past, even during the moments of crisis and rupture in their relationship, the poet and his lover remained intimately connected through their symmetrical reactions. In a sense, symmetry had preserved their relationship as lovers even when grief or loss foreshadowed and invoked their annihilation as individuals. The point is not that love engenders some mysterious telekinesis between lovers, but rather that love and symmetry are so intricately interconnected for Donne that mirroring, the surety of one's identity as part of a loving couple, must pervade and structure even the murderous domain of loss. Paradoxically, then, it would seem that symmetry with the other
can and does persist for the poet in spite of absence, in spite of death.

Such, however, is not quite the case. As the next stanza discloses, the symmetry of the lovers generated through reminiscence cannot survive the open acknowledgement of the other's death. It is as if the word "death" itself, when finally predicated of the poet's lover with literal force, returns the poet to the melancholic realm in which self-exemplification and self-nihilation intertwine. Through this death, symmetry with the other appears to be lost absolutely, a loss which the poet registers, again and again, as a loss or evacuation of self:

But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown;
   Were I a man, that I were one,
   I needs must know; I should preferre,
   If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love; all, all some properties invest;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow,'a light, and body must be here.
(28-36)

For the poet, the loss of the other (a loss of symmetry and recognition) involves a profound loss of certainty which is both verbal and ontological. The poet's defensive parenthetical remark in the stanza's opening line, for example, immediately questions the function of the word "death" as a univocal or proper predication of her condition. Instead, the "word wrongs her." A conventional way to understand this phrase would be to suggest
that because his lover still "enjoyes her long nights festivall" (42), she merely has transformed the mode of her existence and has not died in any absolute sense. There is also the possibility, however, that because the term "death" has sexual overtones, the term "wrongs" her by suggesting, even fleetingly, that her death is orgasmic. The moral indignation registered in the term "wrongs" strangely reinforces this possibility, implying that the term "death" impugns his lover's honor or virtue rather than improperly defining her status. This residue of uncertainty does not prevent the poet, however, from authoring negative predications concerning himself. In the wake of the other's "death," the poet imagines himself as the center of a negative ontology in which he becomes the "Elixer" of the "first nothing." In alchemy, an elixir was the mysterious substance which could change base metals into gold. It also could signify the philosopher's stone or the medicinal essence which alchemists thought could indefinitely prolong life. But the poet is not an elixir in any of these positive senses. Instead, he is an elixir only by a parodic inversion, by imagining an ontology of nothingness and death through the materials, forms and concepts of a magical ontology of life. He is an elixir only through his ability to use language metaphorically, to play with predication.

The language of alchemy, then, does not end the poet's uncertainty about predication. Instead, it serves as the prelude for his descent into a subjunctive mode of self-inquiry in which the poetic subject, anxiously enunciating himself again and
again through his repetitive use of the term "I" (seven times in the stanza), cannot vest himself with any substantial "properties." It is as if the other's death (and the poet's own ambivalent predication of it) has subverted the possibility of any predications at all adhering to the grammatical "I." The poet's very identity as a "man," through his desolating loss, becomes subject to an agitating and fundamentally destabilizing doubt. Language itself, and its power to categorize and confer identity, has lost for him its predicational force. Even binary opposition (man/beast) cannot help the poet specify what he is; it can only remind him of what he is not. The absolute loss of the other, then, unmoors the poet not only from the pleasures (both mundane and ontological) and the specular structures of love, but also from his very position in language. If he "an ordinary nothing were/ As Shadow" he would at least have the structure of a trace. But as a "nothing" defined only by negation, loss and death, he cannot even articulate himself as a trace since he is the mark or vestige of nothing substantial. The very figure of whom he would be a trace--the other--is also nothing. Julia Kristeva has called subjectivity in general a "screen over emptiness," referring to the inevitable object losses (primal losses of recognition) which drive the subject into the realm of representations and symbolicity. For Donne's poet, however, desolate in the wake of loss, subjectivity here is emptiness. His very language, except in his brief reminiscence about his deadly
symmetries with his lover, is devoid of the animating power of affect. He is, as an "I," nothing.

The poet's continual attempt to define himself as "nothing," however, can itself be read as a sort of screen. Edward Taylor, focusing on the logical form of the poet's assertions rather than on their depressive content, argues that the Nocturnall is constructed through "an urbanely fallacious argument."43 His point is that Donne's poetic subject is more masterful than he appears, more involved in a settled rhetorical performance than in melancholic lamentation.44 Performance and expression, however, are not mutually exclusive. That the subject positions himself rhetorically even as he declares his emptiness should not be surprising. When in lines 32-36 the poet mimes syllogistic logic in asserting his extraordinary nothingness, he uses the tools of reason to delineate a condition which is not reasonable. Thus, though he is nothing as a self, he retains a certain logical power as a subject, as one who speaks. But this very focus on the evacuated self is not simply a veil which conceals an underlying, authorial subject. The authorial subject is both obvious and ubiquitous in the poem, fading only during his brief reminiscences concerning his former symmetries with his lover. Rather, both versions of the subject seem to function together as supplemental veils concealing or displacing a more troubling affective domain, a domain of ambivalence in which the poet hates his lover for abandoning him as well as continuing to desire her.
This domain surfaces briefly and cryptically in the poem's final stanza where the poet's overt focus is on his and his lover's absolute divorce from the regenerative arc of nature:

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.  
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne  
At this time to the Goat is runne  
To fetch new lust, and give it you,  
Enjoy your summer all;  
Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,  
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call  
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this  
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.  
(37-45)

Again, as in the poem's second stanza, the poet addresses others in his quest to disclose his absolute difference from them. In this stanza, however, these others do not have to wait for "the next world, that is . . . the next Spring" (11) to becomes lovers. Though seasonal change can supplement their love by fetching "new lust," it only adds to what is already theirs. When the poet urges them to "Enjoy [their] summer all," his use of the present tense implies that such enjoyment can be had now. Their love, unlike his, though it responds to the temporal patterns of nature, undergoes no hibernal darkesses. It may ebb and flow, but it always, seemingly, has heat. And the sun itself, even when it recedes to "the Goat," does so only to return to the lover's with the gift of regenerative warmth. "You lovers," then, according to the poet, live in a world which concerns itself with and responds to their needs. It is a world which mimes human will in its
desire to augment love. In the poet's interior cosmos, however, a cosmos indelibly marked by loss, there can be no such responsiveness, augmentation or heat. His "Sunne," unlike theirs, will not renew. The poet's use of the term "will" in line 37 in relation to this failure of vernal rejuvenation provides the first hint of the poet's latent anger towards his dead lover. Though the poet overtly uses the term merely to indicate that there will be no future regeneration or resurrection of his lover, it also tacitly suggests that such intransigence is by her choice. She will not, rather than cannot, renew. Her difference from "the lesser Sunne" which has gone only to "fetch new lust" consequently appears to be, at least latently, a matter of will. Thus, through his diction, the poet delicately mixes notions of abandonment and rejection with the more dominant notion of his impotence and grief in the face of his lover's death.

The poet's ambivalence towards his lover surfaces again five lines later when he asserts that "shee enjoyes her long nights festivall." The language of pleasure here is surprising for two reasons: first, because it vests the dead other with an explicit sense of consciousness for the first time in the poem; second, because it discloses an asymmetry between the poet and his lover based on her continuing ability to enjoy. The unfathomable emptiness that the poet imagines is his condition is not matched by her; she does not reflect his melancholic misery. Instead, she still experiences affect and even pleasure in spite of absolute separation. This attribution of joy to her in death thus may
appear somewhat suspect. One reason is that throughout Donne's poetry, the autonomous pleasure of women often takes on overtones of inconstancy because, in the poet's eyes, it disrupts the possibility of an absolute symmetry between self and other. Since love, for Donne, is a function of a specular attunement of desire and intent between lovers, the autonomous pleasure of woman suggests that there exists an unsettling, other desire in the binary realm of love. But in spite of the latencies that haunt Donne's evocations of woman's independence and pleasure, in the Nocturnall the poet makes no explicit accusation against his lover. His ambivalence, in a sense, never rises to the point of recognition. Instead, the poet wishes to perpetuate his attachment to his lover, asking his imaginary auditors to allow him to "prepare towards her" and begin his devotional vigil. Even if he is "nothing," he does not overtly want her to become the same.

The poet's desired vigil, however, is not simply an expression of selfless adoration. When the poet asks to be allowed to "call this houre her Vigill, and her Eve," he actually makes two, related requests. The first is that his auditors will permit, and thereby tacitly authorize, his devotion. He wants, in a sense, their recognition of his voidance by love. His second request is that his auditors grant him the primal power to name. Initially, it would seem that all he wants to name is the "houre" of his devotion which he would like to designate as his dead lover's out of tribute. However, the syntax of the sentence betrays a deeper
ambivalence. On the one hand, the phrase "her Vigill, and her Eve" could be read as an example of hendiadys, a rhetorical figure in which an idea is expressed by two nouns rather than by a noun and an adjective. Thus, rather than calling the hour of his devotion her evening vigil, he uses two nouns for stylistic effect, adorning his tribute. On the other hand, the phrase containing the term "Eve" may operate independently of the phrase which precedes it, in which case "her" becomes the direct object of the verb "call" and "Eve" the indirect object. In this reading, "Eve" would register uncannily as a proper name, identifying the poet's dead lover with the biblical Eve, an archetypal figure of male ambivalence towards women. Eve, the mother of all living, is also, in much Christian tradition, the originary cause of death. She is a primal figure of captivation and abjection, of love, anger and loss, of mutuality and infidelity. For the poet, to call his lover "Eve," then, even if only cryptically, is to mix adoration and grief with anger. And because it is he who "calls" her Eve, who names her as such, the poet assumes a certain verbal mastery over her. Through this veiled naming, he equivocally enmeshes her in a tradition, suggesting, allusively and analogically, what she is. In her enjoyment, in her reticent will, she is Eve, the embodiment of female resistance to male desire and law. The poet adopts this power to name to offset the melancholic vulnerability of his devotion. By assimilating his lover and her unacknowledged rejection of him in death with the more conventionally knowable, if similarly ambivalent figure of Eve,
the poet can vest his own misgivings towards her with conventional warrant. He can register his rage and sense of betrayal over her death while veiling it syntactically. He can, in a sense, hate his lover and her inability in death to recognize him while preserving his love and devotion.

What the poet refuses to preserve or generate, however, due perhaps to his own amibivalence about the absolute loss of his lover, is a dream of amorous symmetry. Because of his lover's death, symmetry exists for him only retrospectively, only in the impotent register of memory. In the present, there is nothing for the poetic subject. Even the narcissistic gratifications of enunciation, nomination and an interred sense of anger towards his lover over her absence have no reparative force. In this empty domain of asymmetry, the poet's self-nihilation never correlates with or matches his lover's condition in death. He cannot conjure even a debased specular relation between them. Instead, she remains, at least in his projections, able to experience joy while he shades into a quintessence of nothingness. In the Nocturnall's hibernal darknesses, the other for the poet is reduced to the ambivalent figure who haunts the emptiness after the mirror breaks. She becomes, in effect, the symmetry annihilating void who solicits the poet's nihilistic devotion, his mortified grief and his inadmissable, emptying rage.

VI
Grief is not the end of love, for Donne, but its latent, dark-hued mirror. In Donne's poetry, this mirror assumes a multitude of forms, from the threatening mimesis of *The triple Foose* to the drowning symmetry of *A Valediction of weeping* to the magical but mechanical isomorphism of *A Valediction forbidding mourning* to the melancholic iteration of nothingness that dominates the *Nocturnall*. In each case, the mirror of grief reflects (or refracts) the evanescent, departing or lost symmetries of love. It also reflects, less forwardly, the revision, inversion and/or destruction of amorous symmetry itself through the virtual or real loss of the other. In grief, the desire for symmetry and recognition, for apprehending one's own desires or responses in an other, confronts its loss, and the resulting tension generates, for Donne, a vexed poetics in which aesthetic strategies of displacement and reparation are always haunted, overtly or covertly, by possibilities of annihilation.

Donne's poetics of grief thus appear, as *The triple Foose* itself suggests, to be multilayered and conflicted. On the one hand, by writing their grief, Donne's poets submit it to the authorial power of the poetic subject. The chaos or agitation of loss is in some measure relieved by the order of words, syntax, prosody. In addition, the self-marking gestures of wit through which Donne filters all his poetic experience provides an appearance of egoistic compensation for the dissolution or death of the other as a responsive, desiring speculum. On the other hand, the writing of grief is itself a vexation, a solicitation of
unsettling and potentially annihilating affect. It also undermines
the poet's propriety over his loss since, as poetry, grief is
subject to both the imitative desires of others and their
evaluative judgments. Grief becomes, as the subject of Donne's
poetry, not merely a matter of expression but of display.
Consequently, even when submitted to the fetters of verse, grief
continues to elicit ungovernable pressures--mobilized affect on
the one hand and the only partially scriptable judgments of
auditors on the other. Grief, then, is not "contained" either by
versification or verbalization. Instead, for Donne, grief
generates and emerges from a paradoxical poetics which
simultaneously affirms the power of symbolization and its
impotence, and strangely recognizes the unsettling
interanimation between the two. In this vexed mirror of love,
Donne's poets rehearse both symmetry and its loss, and linger,
with melancholic wit and with a continuing desire for
recognition, on the imaginary tension between them.

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1 *Farewell to love*, In. 20.

2 In *Loves delight*, Donne asserts that the duty of love is "indulgently to fit/ Actives
to passives. Correspondencie/ Only his subject was . . ." (12-13). Here,
complementarity, not symmetry, is held up as love's ideal form. But even in this
poem, however, the idea of symmetry is as important as complementarity in
determining the imagined structure of love.
One of the main problems with Lacan's formulations of mirroring are that they imagine desire as being locked into a dialectic conflict between identification and rivalry, between love and aggression. This implicitly Hegelian version of desire minimizes the fundamental role that grief and mourning take in shaping the dynamics of mirroring and recognition.

A nocturnal upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day, In. 17-18.

One might hear in Donne's paradoxical conceit that love "cures all sorrow/ With more" (7-8) a pun on his wife, Anne's, maiden name. The multiplication of sorrow which resulted from his love for Anne and his precipitous marriage to her are well known (see R. C. Bald, John Donne: a Life, Oxford, Oxford U. Press, 1986, p. 128-154 and the opening of chapter 1 of this work). However, the poem itself emphasizes that this paradox is a universal facet of love, muting or perhaps censoring the melancholy force of the pun. Of course, the possibility exists that Loves growthe was written before the revelation of the marriage to Anne's father in 1602, in which case the pun is uncannily fortuitous but anachronistic.

George Puttenham in The Arte of English Poesie, ed., Gladys Willock and Alice Walker, Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1936, suggests, in a language that anticipates Donne's paradox, that the poetic agitation of sorrow can be remedial rather than vexing, with "one short sorrowing the rhemidie of a long grievous sorrow" (48, orthography modernized). He explains that "Lamentation is altogether contrary to rejoicing, every man saith so, and yet it is a piece of joy to be able to lament with ease, and freely to poure forth a mans inward sorrowes and the greefes wherewith his minde is surcharged. This was a very necessary devise of the Poet and a sine, besides his poetrie to play the Phisitian, and not onely by applying a medicine to the ordinary sickness of mankind, but by making greef it selfe
(in part) cure of the disease" (47, orthography modernized). For Donne, however, affect, once mobilized, is not so easily purged or discharged. Love's agititations begin a rising cycle of sorrow, not a preemptive cure. Donne's optimistic tone does not quell his conceit's more vexing undercurrents.


9Kristeva, "On the melancholic imaginary," p. 112. Because poetry emphasizes what Kristeva would call the "semiotic" elements of language (rhythm, alliteration, rhyme, etc.), she speculates that poetry in general may stem from the depression that results from primary object loss, a time when the semiotic components of language hold more sway than its symbolic components: "would poetry, and, more generally, the style that bears its secret imprint bear witness to a (for the time being) conquered depression?" (Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia U. Press, 1989, p. 65, see also Revolution in Poetic Language, trans., Margeret Waller, New York: Columbia U. Press, 1984, p. 24-30, 46-51, and "On the melancholic imaginary," p. 105). I would argue that such depression (if it is depression and not something more complicated) results not from the loss of an object, but from the breakdown in the jubilant choreography of primal recognition based on imaginary symmetry and responsiveness. Poetry thus would not be an attempt to restore or deny the loss of an object, but an attempt to mime a lost kinetic relation which still persists in the subject as a trace.
Kristeva, "On the melancholic imaginary," p. 109. From her point of view, art itself is often "an extremely faithful semiological representation of the subject's battle with symbolic breakdown" (109-110).


The relations of power and rivalry inherent in mirroring and identification is, as I have argued previously, a Hegelian theme which appears prominently in the influential lectures on Hegel by Alexandre Kojeve (Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, ed., Allan Bloom, trans., James H. Nichols, Jr., Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1980, p. 39-42) and in the speculations of Jacques Lacan, who was influenced by Kojeve, on the mirror stage (see Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan: the Absolute Master, trans., Douglas Brick, Stanford: Standford U. Press, 1991, p. 4-20, 84-87, 127-129).


On the affective power of oral performance, see Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word, New York: Methuen, 1982, p. 31-77.
14 The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, p.431-434. Socrates, for example, tells Glaucon that poetry invariably stimulates affect, not reason: "And the same may be said of lust and anger and all the other affections, of desire and pain and pleasure, which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, though they ought to be controlled . . . " (433). Eric Havelock has argued that Plato's antipathy to poetry in the Republic stems precisely from its ability to generate a mobility and transmissibility of affect through oral performance (Preface to Plato, Cambridge: Belknap, 1963, p. 20-60, 145-164). Donne's poet, wandering along this track, wishes to condemn the singer while exonerating the song, an impossible separation which attempts, perhaps hopelessly, to preserve the author's propriety over the pleasures of melancholic language.

15 Donne, as Barbara Estrin has pointed out, differs significantly from Petrarch in his sense of the relation between poetry and separation or loss of a desired woman: "In Laura's absence, Petrarch celebrates her presence as an artifact. It is the absence Donne fears" ["Donne's Injured 'I': Defections from Petrarchan and Spensarian Poetics," Philological Quarterly, 66 (1987) 175-193, p. 187]. As Estrin asserts, for Petrarch the preservation or memorialization of the female other in poetry serves to assuage grief. Donne, however, does not simply fear absence, as Estrin argues, but more importantly fears a death of symmetry and desiring recognition which transcends presence or absence.

For a reading of the poem which sees the lover's implicitly "glorified bodies" as the "primary material of the poem," see A. B. Chambers, "Glorified Bodies and the 'Valediction forbidding mourning,'" *John Donne Journal*, 1 (1982) 1-20. Chambers is attempting to revise and augment John Freccero's effort to validate his version of Donne's evocation of love in the poem, which Freccero sees as part of Donne's larger effort of "rescuing human love from both the angelic mysticism and the erotic formalism of the Italian tradition and restoring it to its proper domain: humanity" ("Donne's Compass Image," in *John Donne and the 17th-Century Metaphysical Poets*, ed., Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House, 1986, p. 12).

This humanist desire solicits from both critics an attempt to use contemporaneous notions and systems of belief fostered by such disciplines as alchemy, theology and astronomy to explain and reconcile Donne's tropes to an idealist version of love. Avi Erlich, who believes that the poet "both loves and hates the woman to whom he is speaking," articulates a reading of the poem that troubles the more complacent, historicizing readings of critics such as Chambers and Freccero while submitting too easily, in my opinion, to Freudian polarizations ["Ambivalence in John Donne's 'Forbidding Mourning,'" *American Imago*, 36 (1979) 557-372].

David Novarr suggests that Donne's arguments in this poem are not important in themselves, but are rather signs of a dramatic situation in which the poet strives to "divert or distract" his lady from the grief of parting (*The Disinterred Muse*, Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1980, p. 54). He sees the poem's effectiveness in its "sensitivity" to the woman, not in the wit of its conceits. Consequently, he takes Freccero to task for reading the poem as "a subtle treatise, a hermetic text" (45), rather than as a "song." Though I agree with his critique of Freccero, I would argue that Donne's conceits are more focused on submitting grief and separation
to a delimiting discursive grid than on comforting a lady who exists only as a poetic figure. Novarr assumes a "presence" which arises from his own critical desire.

19 The poet's resistance to a "fall" into tears resonates with a certain Lacanian logic in which the subject retains a nostalgia for the primal duality of mirroring relations (primary identification) even though subject to what for Lacan is the quintessential signifier of triangulation (and of the "gaze" of a third party)--the name/no of the father (secondary identification). For an attempt to explain the complex Lacanian discourse around this issue, see Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis, Urbana: U. Illinois Press, 1987, p. 52-64. Ragland-Sullivan, however, fails to adequately critique the Hegelian cast of Lacan's formulations, perpetuating Lacan's refusal to see a difference between recognition and mastery in Imaginary desire. Borch-Jacobsen criticizes Lacan's formulations from another direction: that the Imaginary and Symbolic become indistinct as registers of psychic activity, both being inflections of the same post-oedipal discourse (Lacan, p. 123-145).


21 Roston asserts that "the grim word 'yet' points tremblingly towards the ultimate mortal separation" (The Soul of Wit, New York: Oxford U. Press, 1974, p. 124).

22 The use of a plural form for compass coincides with contemporary usage, but is not as common as the singular form. See the QED, Compact edition, vol. I, p. 488.

23 Erlich, p. 360.

24 A. B. Chambers ("Glorified Bodies") defends the erotic reading of this stanza by suggesting that it has warrent in contemporary beliefs about clitoral erection (19). Thomas Laqueur, in Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1990, p. 45, see also 79-108, refers to a tradition
which is at least as old as Galen that suggests that women's genitals (even her vagina itself) can become "straight" or erect when sexually excited. If Laqueur's general thesis is correct (that almost all of antiquity thought of men and women as having homologous sexual parts which were gendered but not fundamentally opposed), notions of women's erections should not be surprising.


26Barbara Estrin argues that in this poem, and in this stanza in particular, "Donne recreates his woman in the presence of equality" ("Donne's injured 'I,'" p. 188, 191). I would suggest that symmetry is at issue, not equality.


The status of a transitional object, however, is radically complicated when it is not an object per se but a transitory mirror, as it is here.

29Julia Kristeva defines the abject as follows: "The abject has only one quality of the object--that of being opposed to I" (Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection, trans., Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia U. Press, 1982, p.1). She adds that the abject "lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game" (2). Kristeva's basic point is that the subject is constituted not only by what it is (what it incorporates within itself), but by what it is not and, more specifically, by what it expels: "During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (3). For Donne, in the face of pending separation, tears become an ambivalent means of abjecting
the other, that is, expelling her in the process of grieving but also, at least initially, imagining being able to retain her within a representation of abjection.


32 James Baumlín notes the "discrepancy" between the rhetoric of "fruits" and "emblems," and relates it to a "crisis of incarnational rhetoric" in the poem in which the tears as vehicles of presence are "utterly destroyed by absence" (John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse, Columbus: U. Missouri Press, 1991, p. 194-195). The problem with this reading, however, is that the tears are always seen as possible vehicles for the woman's reproduction/representation, but not as figures of incarnation.

33 There is a possible pun here on Anne Donne's maiden name--"More"--which would establish a latent equivalence between tears as emblems of grief and Anne More herself. I do not believe, however, that the poem was "surely to some extent inspired by his wife" as do many critics such as J. B. Leishman (The Monarch of Wit, London: Hutchinson U. Library, 1967, p. 176). Leishman's own overdetermined equivocations intimate the difficulty in defending such an assertion with anything other than a sort of intuitive common sense.

34 Although the rhetoric of colonization is not explicit in the stanza, the notion of mastery suggested by the linkage of mapping with creation owes much, I think, to the cognitive underpinnings of imperialism.

35 Arnold Stein has written that an underlying source of grief in the poem is what he calls the "mutual dangers of oneness" (John Donne's Lyrics, New York: Farrar,
Strauss, Giroux, 1980, p. 196). It is not, however, "oneness" in any immediate sense which is at issue, but rather the problems posed by the destructive interanimation of the lovers' grieving.

36Baumlin, 196. For an analogous conceit in Donne's poetry, see Witchcraft by a picture, In. 2-3.

37Estrin suggests that "equality" has a preservative function in the poem's final couplet: "In the last stanza, equal sighs preserve their lives" (191). The poet-figure's focus in the couplet, however, is not on equality (symmetry would be a better term), but on his need for his lover to limit the power of her grief.

38Estrin, p. 192.


Donne himself, in a sermon, asserted the ability of "balm" (or balsamum as it is also called), an elixir inherent in all living things, to act as a curative: "Everything hath in it . . . a naturall balsamum; which if any wound or hurt which that Creature hath received be kept clean from Extrinsique putrefaction, will heal of itself" (cited in the OED, Compact edition, vol. I, p. 161).

40Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism, Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1987, p. 3-44. In eremitic asceticism, the devout isolate themselves in order to achieve a heroic mortification of the body and temptation. In cenobitic asceticism, which has less affinities with Donne, the devout abnegate themselves in a community, losing themselves in a collective renunciation of self and will.


42Kristeva, Tales of Love, p. 23. For Kristeva, such emptiness is fundamental to the entire dynamics of narcissism and the formation of the subject.

44 Traditionally, this poem has been read expressively and biographically. Herbert Grierson, for example, writing at the beginning of the century, emphasized the sincerity of the poem as a "description of the emptiness of life without love." He also suggested, as have many others since, that the poem may have been written about Anne More (*The Poems of John Donne*, vol. II, London: Oxford, 1912, xxii-xxiii). Lucy, Countess of Bedford, has also been suggested as a possible referent for the poem. Helen Gardner, writing fairly recently, defends this traditional view of the poem and its genesis ("A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day, being the shortest day," in *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance*, ed., Maynard Mack, George DeForest Lord, New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1982, p. 181-183).
Beyond Symmetry: the Sustaining Rhetorics of Death

In Donne's great poems of loss, grief and mourning define the very being of his poetic voices. Language itself seems to surge with affect, or to have been evacuated like the poetic speaker himself. Faced with an anticipated or already felt loss of mirroring and recognition by their lovers, Donne's poet-figures spiral along a verbal pathway that consistently skirts with fears of annihilation. In *A Valediction of weeping*, for example, the poet concludes that "thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore" (9). Similar fears surface in Donne's strange, cantankerous but poignant elegie *On his Mistris* where pending separation induces the poet to imagine his lover bolting from sleep because of nightmares of his death: "Nurse, o my love is slaine, I saw him goe/ O'rr the white Alps alone, I saw him l,/ Assail'd. fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die" (52-54). In these lines, the poet explicitly projects the coupling of loss and death onto his lover. In both instances, the poet imagines that separation from his lover threatens him with annihilation. Because Donne's desire for recognition normally requires *interactive* symmetry, separation can be deadly. Mourning, for Donne, is not far from death.
Death, however, for Donne, is not simply a rhetorical equivalent of annihilation. Though Donne does use death to suggest the dissolution of self wrought by grief and loss, he also imagines death at times as providing a position from which to exercise rhetorical power. This connection between death and verbal force occurs in poems where loss or rejection are threatened, even present, but are not absolute; that is, the necessity of parting or the woman's resistance to the poet's desire for recognition can still be decided or changed. The situation, at least in the poet's eyes, remains open to intersubjective exchange and to verbal self-fashioning. Paradoxically, it is through the abjection and abnegation of death that Donne most fully embraces the violent potentials of language.¹ Through death, a death which now has little to do with annihilation in any literal sense, he can aggressively pursue the female other who refuses him recognition, combatting her autonomy with his own elocutionary strength. Because he is dead, a "victim" of her aggression, he assumes warrent for his roguish attempts to make her recognize him. And from this position beyond death, his rage over woman's autonomy and his own lack of authority acquires explicit verbal force.

The rhetoric of death also serves Donne in another way. Generally, for Donne, the dynamics of love and recognition require the interactive presence of self and other. The pleasures of symmetry emerge from the intersubjective attunement of mutually desiring partners and cannot persist when the partners
are separated. This version of love, however, poses a major psychological difficulty for Donne. If love and recognition require presence, then separation and loss become identical. In Donne's poems of loss in which annihilation poses a compelling threat, this is precisely the problem: separation, loss, and death form in an imaginary chain of equivalences. Parting inevitably leads to dissolution because the very substance of love--interactive symmetry--cannot be mediated or preserved. But if the poetic subject can speak in death, if death itself can speak (or write), then the chain of equivalences is broken, for language intrudes between death and annihilation. The poet, in death and in some sense beyond death, can embrace the power of poetic voice, of writing, and this allows him to recognize and articulate a difference between separation and loss. Through this distinction, the poet's desire for recognition can be deferred rather than obliterated by separation. Loss is not absolute. Death consequently can become, for Donne, a place of diminished pleasures but also a place of diminished losses, a place where poetic enunciation itself displaces annihilation as the outcome of separation or rejection or even male sexual dissipation. In and through death, rhetorical perseverance rivals the pleasures of intersubjective recognition as the subject of the poet's desire.

In A Valediction of my name, in a window, to cite a fairly simple and straightforward example, Donne's poet uses a rhetoric of death to dull the possibilities of betrayal and loss that he sees as inevitably tied to separation. Separation in this poem is
annihilating, at least intitually. The poem begins by invoking the pleasures of mirroring and the poet's wish that his name engraved in his lover's window be able to preserve their love. But because he and his lover must separate, the poet imagines that "loves magique" (11)--the mirroring relation imagined and inscribed on the beloved's window--will be obliterated when the female other "Flings ope this casement . . . / To looke on one, whose wit or land,/ New battry to thy heart may frame" (44-46). Through this act, the poet's name, "engrav'd" (1) in the glass, vanishes from the woman's sight as does the mirroring relation itself. Separation, in the poet's imagination, is betrayal and loss. His beloved's desire, much to the his chagrin, cannot be contained either by the window itself, the mirroring fantasy he constructs, or the name which he hopes will secure his propriety over her love. Though he wishes that his name will continue to "flow/ Into [her] fancy" (57-58) and stave off his total annihilation by her imagined act of "treason" (55), he no longer trusts in his verbal domination of her desires. In fact, through her projected infidelity, her imagined desires come to dominate his. Mirroring, the loving relation which the poet had held out as ideal, thus gives way to a fantasized struggle for domination, one from which the poet rather impotently withdraws:

Neere death inflicts this lethargie,
And this I murmur in my sleepe;
Impute this idle talk, to that I goe,
For dying men talke often soe.

(63-66)
In a sense, this withdrawal towards death is a submission, but it is a displaced submission. Rather than being dominated by the woman's desire, a desire he imagines as threateningly other, the poet chooses to be dominated by his own poetic rhetoric, blaming his "dying" talk for the fears and anger he has articulated. In a sense, he surrenders to his own voice rather than to annihilation, retreating from an imaginary realm in which the woman's desire dominates and obliterates him to a marginally more amenable realm in which an acceptance of his pending separation from the other still allows him to retain a certain measure of subjectivity. His desires to mirror the woman and/or to dominate her thus give way to a third desire—to survive her, a desire which may entail forms of submission as well as domination. His recourse to a rhetoric of death, then, has two important purposes: it allows him to negotiate his relation with the female other in a way that avoids the potentially obliterating power of her autonomy; and it allows him to imagine and improvise a version of male subjectivity which can assimilate and endure abjection and rejection. In and through death, then, he articulates a "place" for male subjectivity which eludes any possible overt domination by the woman's desire, a place in which male subjectivity can survive, in a mortified form, its vulnerability to grief, annihilation and woman.

This use of death in response to projections or manifestations of female power, of course, was not unique to Donne. He wrote in
a poetic milieu in which erotic desire, death and relations of power were conventionally and intimately connected. Love, according to much of the amorous rhetoric of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, often trailed death in its wake. In lyric poetry, this coupling can be traced back, at least in part, to the influence of Petrarch, who frequently specified both enthrallment itself and the shame, rage and sense of submission which resulted from unrequited love as forms of death. In the Petrarchan tradition (and anti-tradition) as it appeared in England, the connection between death, erotic captivation and unmirrored male desire became a poetic commonplace and, at times, a rhetorical banality. Male lovers, torn by women's power to allure and reject, to completely confound male will and to withhold recognition, imagined themselves as dead, slain either by their beloved's eyes or her scorn. Edmund Spenser, for example, begins one of the sonnets in his Amoretti by hyperbolically asking his lady whether her malevolence results from the murderous power of her eyes: "Fayre cruell, why are ye so fierce and cruell,/ Is it because your eyes have powre to kille?" Philip Sidney, whose sonnet sequence Astrophil and Stella explicitly mimes Petrarchan themes, often uses similar imagery. In sonnet 48, to cite an exemplary instance, his male courtier, frustrated by his lady's resistance to his love, melodramatically asks her to continue assaulting him with her luscious but deadly gaze: "Yet since my death-wound is already got,/ Dear killer, spare not thy sweet cruel shot?" In this
tradition, death haunts love as the signifier of woman's dual power over men—to enthral and to disdain them. It is male impotence (and a conventionalized theatrical acquiescence to it), then, rather than loss itself that drives this amorous rhetoric of death.7

Love and death were also connected during this period in other ways. Male orgasm itself often was conventionally and waggishly referred to as a form of "dying," implicating the consummation of love with momentary annihilation or an unsettling depletion of male vitality.8 In the familiar words of Shakespeare, "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame/ Is lust in action," where male climax appears as an irredeemable form of expenditure.9 Women and their genitals (subtly and misogynously alluded to by Shakespeare as a "waist of shame"10) often become, in this symbolic network, the sign or debilitating source of male sexual dissipation and death. In a virulent and extravagantly simple-minded Carolinian poet such as John Suckling, the rhetorical yoking together of women, sexuality and death becomes explicit and sardonically macabre:11

If I gaze now, 'tis but to see
What manner of deaths-head 'twill be,
    When it is free
    From that fresh upper skin,
    The gazers Joy, and sin . . . .

A quick corse me-thinks I spy
In ev'ry woman; and mine eye
    At passing by,
Checks and is troubled, just
As if it rose from Dust.

They mortifie, not heighten me:
These of my sins the Glasses be . . . .
(26-30, 41-47)

Women, for Suckling, no longer allure as figures of love. Instead, they "mortifie" rather than "heighten" him, killing his amorous desire. Further, they exhibit a morbid transparency, revealing, beyond appearances, an indwelling face of death. This face, however, is not foreign to the poet; rather, it precisely mirrors his own, or at least that internal face which he characterizes as his "sins." Thus, in women, the poet sees an imaginary reflection of his own carnality: that is, his concupiscence, his sexual mortification and his death. And it is this projective mirroring and the "death" it entails which at the end of the poem he rejects by repudiating women. In the "Glasses" that women have become for him, he sees, strangely, only revulsive aspects of himself. Love, therefore, must be renounced because it involves him with what he perceives as reflections of his own impotence. He will no longer expend male spirit on figures who threaten him with death.

Donne, at times, participates in and appropriates this tradition, using the rhetoric of death as a means to distance himself from the supposed erotic power and allure of woman. One reason for Donne's interest in this rhetoric, perhaps, is that women are, for Donne, at times, potential agents of death (amongst other things). Sexually, they have the ability to "kill"
men, to involve men in the temporary annihilation of orgasm. He makes this case in The First Anniversarie where he suggests wittily but assuredly that because of Eve's primal transgression marriage and sexuality necessarily involve male dissolution or death:

For that first marriage was our funerall:
One woman at one blow, then kill'd us all,
And singly, one by one, they kill us now.
We doe delightfully our selves allow
To that consumption; and profusely blinde,
We kill our selves, to propagate our kinde.

(105-110)

Even as agents of death, however, women here remain potently appealing. In spite of their conventional ability to decimate men, to cause male "languishment" (102), they retain the enthralling power to elicit male pleasure. With women, according to the poet, men delight in and survive dying. Though sexuality still is a site of death, a consumption, the very conventionality of Donne's rhetoric diminishes the force of this impotence. Orgasmic "dying" is as much a poetic stance as it is a sign of male sexual anxiety. And consequently sex retains its capacity to produce pleasure. It remains a site of alluring gratification, of consummated desire.15 Women, though denigrated by this rhetoric of orgasmic death, are neither cast off nor idealized but held at a paradoxically chaste, rhetorical distance. Rather than being abjured in any simple sense, they become the subjects of a more ambivalent rhetoric, one which equates death with male
sustenance and delight. It is "propagation"--the replacement of the self with a simulacrum (a child)--which seems to draw the poet's more unequivocal aversion, not women.

Donne's rhetoric of sexual dying, however, is not always so waggishly ambivalent. At times, it takes on a tone of sardonic bravura that resembles Suckling's, implicating women in a male, post-coital death which both threatens annihilation and repudiates sexual pleasure. In *Farewell to Love*, the most telling example of this phenomenon, Donne's poet moves metonymically from a disparagement of the sex act itself to a general maligning of women and their sexuality. He begins knavishly, aligning erotic consumption (and women) with putrefaction: "... the thing which lovers so/ Blindly admire, and with such worship woo;/ Being had, enjoying it decayes" (14-16). For the poet, the impermanence of male sexual performance signifies decomposition and, by extension, death. Sexual desire thus becomes, in some sense, the same as a desire for death. Initially, the blame for this irony is laid on "Nature:"

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots & \text{ as shee would man should despise} \\
& \text{The sport,} \\
& \text{Because that other curse of being short,} \\
& \text{And onely for a minute made to be} \\
& \text{Eager, desires to raise posterity.} \\
& \text{(26-30)}
\end{align*}
\]

According to the poet, "shee" (that is, "Nature") limits male erotic enjoyment in order to focus sexuality on procreation. Because of this limitation, intercourse comes to simulate life
itself: both are short and terminate in a form of death. Men, "onely for a minute made to be eager," thus sublimate pleasure into reproduction. Consequently, the "propagation" that had suggested aversion in *The First Anniversarie* here becomes desirable. Within the purview of death and decay, apparently, amorous pleasure must give way to other, less immediate gratifications. Nature herself, according to the poet, directs men away from libertine eroticism and towards deferred and displaced rewards. However, such deferral does not resolve the poet's manifest problem--the connection between women, orgasm and male dissipation. Thus, in the poem's next and final stanza, he announces his decision to shun women, framing the partner in his sexual malaise as its cause: "I'll no more dote and runne/ To pursue things which had indammag'd me" (33-34). The ambiguity of the term "things" marks the slippage being effected here. "Things" can refer either to the sex act itself or to women; semantically they become the same. And thus the constitutional sexual vulnerability of men passes almost imperceptibly into an erotic vulnerability to women.

Nevertheless, for Donne's poet, a conscious farewell to love will not end his attraction to "moving beauties" (35). In fact, it cannot even ensure that he will not engage in intercourse again. The note of cynical bravado and distanciation that marks the end of the poem--"If all faile,/ 'Tis but applying worme-seed to the Taile" (39-40)--tacitly enfolds within it an admission that the poet cannot resist the desire to "die" with women. Either he can
apply an anaphrodisiac and "kill" his own erection, anticipating and controlling (and in a sense simulating) the "death" that he associates with intercourse, or he can distance himself from the act by instrumentalizing it, imagining love-making merely as a spreading of procreative seed. In either case, he preserves a form of consummation—either flaccidity or orgasm—which he has already allied with death. Regardless of his farewell to love, then, the poet cannot divest himself of what he perceives, in part satirically, as a deadly eroticism. In spite of his rhetorical cynicism, he cannot resist women. They remain both the objects of his desire and, in spite of his roguish attempt in the final couplet to control and distance himself from the sex act itself, a potential matrix of loss and death.

The jaunty, cynical tone that Donne assumes in his poetry of sexual dying is a conventional way that men survive their vulnerability to women. They die sexually, but can laugh about it later with other men. Through this verbal play and rhetorical distance, male fears of sexual dissipation and impotence can be, in some measure, contained. A more vexing problem for Donne is how to mediate imagined rejection by or the loss of the woman he desires, both of which threaten to obviate and foreclose his desire for recognition. For if sexuality complicates the dynamics of recognition, rejection and loss can obliterate them. Donne's response to this possibility is to imagine and embrace his own death, and to use that death as a rhetorical position from which
to attempt an aggressive verbal campaign to solicit or sustain the recognition he desires.

In conventional Petrarchanism, death caused by the beloved's scorn or rejection often incites a transformation in the male poetic subject. His affective investment shifts away from the disdainful or chaste lover and comes to focus on writing itself, specifically on the appropriation of the lover within a poetics of memorialization and fame.\(^{18}\) The rhetoric of death (and rejection) thus serves in this tradition as a supplemental backdrop for a withdrawal from women (from *engagement* with an other) and a valorization of the potency of poetic discourse itself. For Donne, however, the transformations of the poetic subject imposed by "death" are different. In fact, Donne often seeks to intensify or even revivify his relation to the female other through his embrace of death rather than seeking to memorialize what has been lost.\(^{19}\) *The Dampe* presents an exemplary instance of this phenomena with Donne's rejected suitor presenting an elaborate display of death in order to seduce his female auditor. The poem begins by imagining a future moment when the seducer, having been killed by his lady's disdain and honor, will undergo an anatomy:

When I am dead, and Doctors know not why,
And my friends curiositie
Will have me cut up to survey each part,
When they shall finde your Picture in my heart,
You thinke a sodaine dampe of love
Will through all their senses move,
And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
Your murder, to the name of Massacre.

(1-8)

Death, here, is not the abject nothingness that attends the loss of a lover in such poems as *A Valediction of weeping* or *A Nocturnall*. Rather, it provides the arena for an aggressive attempt to reframe the dynamics of power and desire between the poet and the woman he longs for. In a sense, through death, he appropriates absolute impotence only to invert it, to use it as a staging for his seductive assault on her otherness. Initially, death marks a double defeat: the suitor has been slain by the woman, and he also must submit to a further dis-articulation of self as his friends dismember him to find the cause of his demise. Scorned by the woman, he becomes the vulnerable object of an aggressive "curiositie"—of a collective male gaze.²⁰ Further emphasizing his figurative emasculation, or at least his absolute loss of power, is the fact that his very center, his heart, contains and is in a sense signified by the woman's picture. At his very core lies only the image of the other.

He is not alone, however, in his vulnerability. The woman's image possesses an alluring and debilitating power that the poet imagines can massacre all onlookers. They will be slain, as he was, by her beauty. Significantly, he projects this fantasy of the woman's power onto the woman herself, saying that it is she who imagines it (*You thinke a sodaine dampe of love...*, my italics). This projection serves two functions. First, it tacitly
diminishes the woman's power. The potential death of the
anatomists is only part of her fantasy, a fantasy that the poet
voices for her. Her power, he implies, is tied to her narcissism
(her imaginary inflation of her erotic lethality), and consequently
does not bear the objective value which he portrays her as
attributing to it. The poet thus feels justified in calling her
erotic conquests "Poore victories" at the beginning of the second
stanza, diminishing them as manifestations of her power.
Second, since the fantasy of the murderous "dampe" is hers, and
not his, it allows the poet to distance himself from the male
desire for violence which infects the final lines of the stanza.
Syntactically, the verb "preferre" takes the "you" of line five as
its subject. In this "proper" reading, the woman imagines that
the deadly power of her picture will raise her "murder" of the
poet to the status of "Massacre" by killing all observers.
However, the phrasing "and so preferre/ Your murder, to the name
Massacre," also suggests an opposition between what lies before
the comma and what lies after it. In this "improper" reading, the
separation of "preferre" from its subject has important
implications, vesting the verb with a certain syntactic ambiguity
and independence and allowing it to assume the anatomists as its
subject rather than the woman. It is they, in this secondary
reading, who would "preferre/ Your murder, to the name of
Massacre." In this violent formulation of desire, the endangered
men would prefer murdering the woman to being killed
themselves. Since erotic captivation is, according to the poet's
fantasized scene, a path which leads only to impotence and death, and not to recognition, violence against the woman appears as its latent alternative.

Such violence is not, however, something that the poet overtly admits as his. Instead, he distances himself from the desire for a murderous defense of male power in two ways: first, by burying it in ambiguous syntax, in a sentence which more overtly signifies something quite different; and second, by making even this syntactically disavowed rendering of violent desire part of the woman's fantasy rather than his own. Explicit violence--murder--is not his acknowledged response to male vulnerability, nor is it his acknowledged response to woman and her power to "slay" men with her chaste or disdaining beauty. Instead, his manifest response is seduction, an attempt to overcome or at least match her power by persuading or cozening her into recognizing and responding to his desire. Seduction is an engaged if symbolically violent attempt to convert his impotence to potency.

This seduction actually begins with the poem's originating rhetoric of death. The seducer, through his own imaginary decease, represents in a hyperbolic and disingenuous fashion what he imagines as the lady's desire--the termination of his overtures. In death, he will no longer perturb her with his advances. Thus his imaginary death actually serves to produce a strange form of mirroring, one which constructs, however morbidly and abjectly, a hint of attunement between the poet and
the lady's desire. He augments this latent mirroring when he later mentions that the result of the fantasized anatomy is the discovery of the lady's picture in his heart. On the dissecting table, before a crowd of male onlookers, he reveals that at the core of his being he is merely a mirror image of her, a reproduction of her enthralling form. Further, he suggests (even if he attributes this fantasy to her) that all the men who might see this image would be infected by a "sodaine dampe of love;" that is, all would recognize her beauty, become captivated with it, and prove fatally susceptible to her erotic power. In their adoration, they would mirror what the poet tacitly projects as the woman's own narcissistic attachment to herself. For an imaginary moment as the "dampe of love" suffuses through the coterie's male members, the woman's beauty is, in a sense, omnipotent. It controls the entire field of desire, and effortlessly inverts the conventional distributions of power. The gathered men, manifesting an "empirical" gaze which combines the desire for knowledge with socially invested authority, find that gaze to be impotent before the woman's enthralling form.21 Their dissective mastery of the male body cedes to a captivated impotence before the woman's alluring form.

The seduction thus begins in an appearance of impotence and abjection.22 Cast off by the woman, the seducer exaggerates his and his coterie's powerless response to her form in order to represent both the potency of her desire and to present a verbal mirror for her narcissism (as construed by him). He also
imagines his death for another reason: to begin to oppose her power to enthrall with his power to imagine and to write. By iterating the deadly influence of the woman's beauty, he starts to appropriate it, reducing it to one signifying element within his discourse. Her power to enthrall, by becoming merely *rhetorically* deadly, loses much of its less codifiable destructiveness. It is now, at least for the seducer, incorporated within a verbal arena of attraction and seduction which he has constructed. In a sense, the woman no longer *possesses* what for the poet is the murderous power of the other. His imaginary death thus becomes a rhetorical staging through which he works to transform masculine vulnerability and impotence into verbal power.

The woman's capacity to enthrall, however, is not the only impediment to the seducer's verbal power. She, too, has verbal resources:

First kill th'enormous Gyant, your *Disdaine*,  
And let the'enchantresse *Honor* next be slaine,  
And like a Goth and Vandal rize,  
Deface Records, and Histories  
Of your owne arts and triumphs over men,  
And without such advantage kill me then.  
(11-16)

These resources come in two forms, both of which threaten the seducer. The first is the verbal network alluded to in his sardonic reference to "Honor" and "Disdaine" as the woman's unseemly but powerful allies. By defining them as an
"enchantresse" and a "Gyant," respectively, the poet associates both terms, and the source of the woman's resistance, with a realm which is both socially marginal and subversive in an attempt to disarm it. These terms, however, particularly "honor," are not, in spite of the poet's fancy, marginal at all. Instead, they participate in a very conventional and central sexual code which articulates and underwrites the cultural wish to proscribe or restrict women's amorous desires. The woman's chastity in relation to the poet thus has verbal warrant, warrant that the poet believes he must waggishly attack if he wishes to seduce her. ²³ He must, it seems, supplant the force of this code with his own libertine rhetoric, making his words and his words alone the vehicle of her desire. Her verbal resources, however, do not end with internalized cultural proscriptions or rules of conduct. The seducer recognizes that she also has "Records, and Histories," an archive of experience, which supports her amorous powers and resistance. This archive, according to the poet, is not merely a neutral register of experience, however; instead, he sees it as a chronicle of power and social inversion. It specifically logs the woman's triumphs over men, producing a "martial" tradition which gives her an "advantage" over the poet in their amorous engagement (or lack thereof). Apparently, this archive provides the woman with a mimetic template for further victories. It allows her to frame her resistance within an empowering pattern of repetition which buttresses her against the seducer's attempts to breach that pattern. According to him,
the woman's encounters with seducers has a history, one which chronicles her customary conquests over men and their "masculine persuasive force." In her personal tradition, she habitually "kills" potential lovers with her honor and disdain, and it is this record of power which the seducer wishes, through his badinage, to induce the woman to deface.

His strategy of persuasion is twofold. First, he encourages the woman to imitate the "Goth and Vandal" invasion of Europe, that is, to act as a barbarian, as someone who aggressively attacks and defaces European (Roman) custom, history and civility. By suggesting this comparison, he continues to grant the woman power, but frames that power as functioning outside the context of European law or convention. Her victories now can assume a new, more licentious, form. She can raze the very code and history which had defined her previous conquests. She can turn against her own verbal resources and obliterate them, making her power, in a sense, totally autonomous, free of the imprint of standard social rule. The second part of the seducer's strategy is to dare the woman to use this inundating, aggressive power to "kill" the poet himself. His waggish hope is that if the woman accepts his reformulation of her power--it now would stem from aggressive, lawless engagement rather than from verbally cultivated resistance--her ability to "kill" him would also change. Their skirmishing, at least in the poet's eyes, would tacitly acquire sexual overtones. By responding at all to the poet's wish that she deface her "Records, and Histories," the
woman would begin to mirror his desire, to exchange her verbal resources for his. And perhaps, the poet hopes, without the "advantage" of possessing registers of verbal resistance, her "killing" of him would also, audaciously, resonate with his desire, sliding from mortification and distanciation to consummation, to sexual dying, a death which entails some measure of recognition.

This strategy, however, as fictionalized in the poem, does not succeed. As the final stanza reveals, the seducer admits this failure and works to embed the rhetorical wit and subversive ingenuity that dominated the first two stanzas in a more imperious and peremptory attempt to assert and authorize his desire in the third. Masculine bravado thus envelopes the seducer's manifestly unavailing attempts to manipulate the woman's imagined narcissism as he engages in a final gambit to induce the woman to recognize and respond to his sexual desire and rhetorical power:

For I could muster up as well as you
   My Gyants, and my Witches too,
Which are vast Constancy and Secretnesse,
But these I neyther looke for or professe;
   Kill mee as Woman, let mee die
As a meere man; doe you but try
Your passive valor, and you shall find than,
In that you'have odds enough of any man.
   (17-24)

As in The Flea, the gap between stanzas generates an indeterminate interval marked by the woman's resistance to the
seducer's badinage. The poet responds to this resistance by imagining two verbal partisans of his own that correspond symmetrically to those which he articulated as undergirding the woman's sexual propriety. Her chastity (in relation to the poet) had been warranted by "honor" and "disdain;" his seductive desire is concordantly warranted by "constancy" and "secretness." But the poet does not enunciate these terms to convince the woman of his fidelity and propriety. Rather, he states them as an imaginary show of force. He, in explicitly martial phrasing, announces that he could "muster up" his own verbal conscripts to offset (or perhaps vanquish) the woman's if he deigned to do so. And he emphasizes his mastery of this power by performatively relinquishing it. Though he could fight the woman term for term, code for code, he voluntarily chooses not to do so. This flaunting assumption and renunciation of potency serves a very particular purpose for Donne's poet: it allows a conjured appearance of power to stand in the place of any actual deployment or realization of it. He can thereby vest himself with a certain illusory measure of virile authority which the woman cannot directly challenge, engage or deflate. Because this "potency" is merely shown and withdrawn, it remains secluded from her countervailing powers. It also prepares the way for what immediately follows: the seducer's attempt to convert her "murder" of him from a signifier of woman's resistance to male desire to a signifier of her capitulation to it.
He does this aggressively and disingenuously, granting her the power to "kill" him and charging her to use it, yet putting this "power" in a context in which its exercise means compliance and, perhaps, recognition, rather than autonomy. As "Woman," as a representative embodiment of her gender, the woman possesses the gendered resources to kill the poet sexually. This capacity, however, no longer manifests female autonomy or even male anxiety about sexual consummation and its aftermath. Instead, the woman's power to "kill" the poet has become synonymous with her performance of his desire. In effect, the poet has inverted the heterosexual dynamics which have defined the arena of the woman's power in the poem. In the opening stanza, her capacity to kill was an effect of her beauty and her resistance to the poet and his overtures; it was an effect of her alluring but potentially lethal autonomy. In the final stanza, in contrast, her power to kill has become an effect of acquiescence to the seducer's will, of her submission to his seduction. Though the seducer still declares his deference to her will ("let mee die/ As a meere man"), it is only in order to rhetorically institute what I shall call a hierarchical symmetry. Through his directive for the woman to kill him, the seducer acknowledges the woman's aggressive resistance to his banter, but deftly incorporates it as an inflection of his desire. They both, in some sense, wish for him to die. In and through his audacious imperative, then, the seducer strives to bend the woman's aggressive resistance to him into sexual license, to somehow make them the same, and
thereby generate a desiring symmetry between them.\textsuperscript{25} This symmetry, however, as the seducer goes on to disclose, requires that the woman revert to more overtly hierarchal gender relations, that is, to ones defined and controlled by patriarchal distributions of roles and power. Her resources are therefore reduced to her "passive valor," her courage to yield to men's sexual advances. And even though she retains "odds enough of any man," that power can only come through passivity. According to the seducer, in order to engage a man in the gendered dance of power and recognition, she must reflect and assent to the verbal force of his sexual desire.

For Donne's seducer, then, the rhetoric of death becomes a roguish means through which to translate his impotence in relation to women into a show or articulation of power. In \textit{The Dampe}, Donne specifically tries to contest the power women acquire through their capacity to resist mirroring or withhold recognition. The poem traces out and attempts to institute the defensive male wish to develop a hierarchical version of symmetry or mirroring in order to combat and invert the imbalance of power engendered by the ability of woman to captivate and scorn men. A key element in this venture is the seducer's effort to reformulate woman's power as an effect of her sexual yielding, her passivity. Death in all its overdetermined forms in the poem serves as the metaphoric scene of this inversion. And unlike poets writing in the Petrarchan tradition, this rhetoric of death is not, for Donne's
seducer, predominantly a means of establishing a sphere of literary potency secluded from the amorous powers of woman; rather, it is the means through which the poet registers his desire to engage, incorporate and contest woman's amorous powers. It is the means through which he forcefully bids to persuade a recalcitrant but enthralling woman to make her desire his.

In *The Apparition*, the male attempt to reclaim power from woman through a rhetorical staging of death reaches fantastic, virulent, and phantasmic proportions. As with *The Dampe*, the poem issues from male outrage over rejection. It does not, however, try to sublimate that anger within the contentious dynamics of seduction. Instead, it rages openly, attempting to diminish the woman's gendered powers by trussing up her sexuality with male impotence, abjection and death:

> When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,  
> And that thou thinkst thee free  
> From all solicitation from mee,  
> Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
> And thee, fain'd vestall, in worse armes shall see;  
> Then thy sicke taper will begin to winke,  
> And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,  
> Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke  
> Thou call'st for more,  
> And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,  
> And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou  
> Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye  
> A veryer ghost then I;  
> What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
> Lest that preserve thee;'and since my love is spent,  
> I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
Then by my threatening rest still innocent.

The poem begins conventionally.26 The rejected suitor, apparently responding to the woman's "scorne," anticipates that eventually this contemptuousness will grant her a murderous power over him, leaving him dead and justifying his designation of her as "murdresse." This stock rhetoric, however, is only the prelude for the macabre fantasy which comprises the main body of the poem and which translates the suitor's initial impotence in courtship into a spectral appropriation of retributive power. Death, in his fantasy, entails neither mortification nor annihilation. Instead, it facilitates a misogynous inversion of amorous power and control. The woman, in spite of her scorn, will not be able to free herself from "all solicitation" (my italics) by the poet. Though he will not, in death, attempt to seduce her, he will continue to force her to respond to his intrusions into her life. In particular, he intends for her to see, through his phantasmic presence, her own sexual impotencies. He will accomplish this agenda in two ways. First, his preternatural appearance will cause the woman's "sicke taper [to] begin to winke," an assertion which plays off of the suitor's designation of the woman as a "fain'd vestall" in the previous line. According to the suitor's rhetoric, the woman's chastity is an illusion, a ruse which serves to enfranchise the autonomy of her sexual desires (since it allows her to choose some partners while rejecting others). Through this imputation, he avers that
the rejection of his amorous desires by the woman is not a disclosure of her preference but an act of sexual duplicity and power. By choosing another lover, she displaces him from the sexual position which he assumes as his. It is she, he imagines, not he, who controls phallic gratification. Thus, it is not surprising that he would portray his spectral influence on her in phrasing resonant with phallic implications. The woman's "taper," which was already "sicke," will gutter towards extinction because of the poet's mortifying presence. The flame she controls becomes evanescent and diseased, and more importantly, subject to the rejected suitor's own death-charged influence.

The suitor's verbal assault on his beloved's amorous power, however, is not limited to his own spectral influence. In fact, he creates an imaginary future lover for her in order to further undermine the potency of her sexuality. This lover, like the suitor himself, seeks to control her imputed sexual will, but his emphasis is on her apparently excessive appetite rather than her reticence. This focus is brought into sharp relief when the woman, frightened by the suitor's ghost, tries to rouse her fictive partner from sleep. Rather than respond to her prompts, which he mistakenly assumes are sexual, the lover passively but effectively assumes control over their relation by feigning the impotence of sleep. Even in the somnolent lethargy of his gradual awakening, he impulsively recoils at what he imagines is the woman's onerous lust. "Being tyr'd before," he mimes impotence
in order to keep the woman from engendering the real thing. Her demand--for support, for comfort, for protection from the suitor's apparition, for recognition--is thereby rendered impotent because it will not be able to produce a desired response in her lover. Through his willful withdrawal from her, he negates the captivating force of her amorous power by refusing to recognize it, rendering himself independent of her both in terms of sexual desire and performance. She cannot "kill" him because he will no longer "die" for her. Thus, by turning his post-coital lassitude into passive rejection, the lover changes male sexual vulnerability (death) into a form of power, and woman's imaginary sexual prowess into a desperate, ineffectual call for help.

The suitor, then, through his macabre fantasy, attempts to annul what he perceives to be the major sources of the woman's amorous powers: her ability to attract and reject men, and her ability to consume men sexually. Momentarily freed from these powers by his own fancied death and the spent withdrawal of his surrogate, the suitor finally can imagine the woman as powerless, abject and contemptible--a "poore Aspen wretch . . . Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat." She has become, in his fantasy, the victim of her own mercurial lusts. Her body itself manifests her sexual corruption, sweating out a substance--quicksilver--used in contemporary treatments of syphilis. The woman, then, as an erotic being, oozes with and exudes her diseased, promiscuous condition. Her sweat, however, also
signifies her debasement in another way. Bathed in a film of quicksilver perspiration, she has become, according to the suitor, "a veryer ghost than I," that is, a spectral double who is more ghostly (more lurid and perhaps more destitute) than her model. She has become, in effect, a parodic mirror of him, a more intense, more grotesquely embodied (and more ludicrous) reflection of his own deathly abjection because of unrequited love. Divorced from her amorous powers, neglected by her lover, and haunted by the suitor's apparition, she has been reduced from being a "murdresse," an agent of death, to being a ghostly speculum, a being whose quicksilver integument reflects only the fear and abject mortification involved in unreciprocated desire and love. She has become, in a sense, a parodic inversion of the dream of symmetry that inheres in love, a reflection not of the suitor's desire but of his abjection, his own amorous death.

Rancorously maligning the woman, however, is apparently not enough to satisfy the suitor's wish to recover a sense of masculine potency, to overcome his imaginary death. Consequently, in the poem's final lines, he makes a flaunting show of power before the woman he has figured as powerless, abject and implicitly diseased. As in the final stanza of The Dampe, however, this power is asserted rather than manifested. More to the point, this display of power derives any potency it may have only from the performative reunciation of its use:

What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
Lest that preserve thee; 'and since my love is spent,
I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
then by my threatenings rest still innocent.  
(14-17)

The suitor's power is, ultimately, derived from secrecy itself,  
from the potentially devastating (but perhaps illusory) force of  
the unsaid. It is also a power which is directly derived from his  
attempt to assert his control over what is and can be said. By  
refusing to divulge to the woman the dire threats that his  
apparition will utter in their imagined future confrontation, the  
suitor suggests that he will prevent the woman from changing  
the course of her behavior. This silence strangely forecloses the  
possibility of her remaining sexually "innocent," that is, chaste,  
both in relation to other potential lovers and to the suitor's own  
desire. In spite of this wish that the woman condemn herself,  
however, implicit in the suitor's rhetoric is a latent wish that  
the woman, rather than act the part of "murdresse," would choose  
to return his amorous interest. But because of her rejection of  
him, this wish is defended against rather than disclosed. When  
the suitor tells the woman that his "love is spent," he takes the  
language of sexual expenditure and uses it to disavow the  
possibility that he could love her. He is already, at least  
figuratively, past consummation, and therefore entirely focused  
on vengeance rather than seduction or even indignant, covert  
courtship. Thus, he denies his own vulnerability to her alluring  
presence, and rhetorically appropriates for himself two modes  
through which men institute their power over women: sexual
consummation followed by distanciation, and an exertion of control over the said and the unsaid. By not disclosing what his appertition will say, the suitor imagines that he can force the woman to mirror his desire. She will transgress and face the heightened rhetorical power of his ghost; she will have to submit to his fantasized deadly vengeance. His secrecy also serves to protect the illusory power of the apparition's words themselves. If he stated them now, perhaps the woman would renounce her other desires, perhaps she would even come to recognize the suitor's desire, but perhaps she would also continue to spurn him, scorning not only his amorous wishes but also the imaginary, spectral rhetoric which is the surety of his revenge. As the suitor himself seems to understand, he has power over the woman only through secrecy and death, only through his own occultation. He cannot, as it were, expose the signifiers of his masculine power and desire to the woman where they might be, contemptuously or disdainfully, cut off.

In *The Funerall*, as in *The Apparition*, Donne creates a poet-figure who bears witness to the muderous power of a disdaining, absent or perhaps even dead woman. In this poem, however, the poet is more ambivalent and tentative in his condemnation of his beloved, at least initially. The reason for this hesitancy is twofold: first, she has sent him a "subtile wreath of hair" (3), a mystical surrogate or fetish which he fancies will protect him from complete dissolution; and second, he apparently cannot decipher in any final way the meaning of this gift. In this poem,
separation, perhaps, can be mediated; it may not lead to loss. The self-righteous, assured outrage and embracing of death which drives *The Apparition* consequently does not dominate this poem since the poet apparently cannot be sure of his beloved's intent, though he does, eventually, submit the woman to an angry rhetoric of death. The crux of the poet's uncertainty lies in the wreath of hair itself, which functions for him both as mystical sign of continuing recognition and attunement and as a disturbing enigma which reveals only the indecipherable and threatening otherness of the woman's intention and meaning. In a sense, in this poem, unlike *The Apparition*, it is the woman's unspoken message, *her* "word," which manifests itself without disclosure, which attempts to control the dynamics of loss, and which therefore assumes the appearance of power.

The poet himself, in the poem's opening stanza, attempts to vest the wreath of hair with a magical potency, an ability to mitigate the powers of death that he associates with the undefined loss of his lover. But as if to circumscribe that power, he immediately defines its meaning and function for those who would shroud his love-slain body for burial, making its potency his:

> Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harme  
> Nor question much  
> That subtle wreath of haire, which crowns my arme;  
> The mystery, the signe you must not touch,  
> For 'tis my outward Soule,  
> Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
> Will leave this to controule,
And keepe these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution.

As the poet recognizes, however, whatever value the hair assumes as a "mystery" is extremely fragile since it can endure neither the touch of observers nor being questioned much about its significance. Apparently, the wreath's symbolic power requires protection from the potentially destructive (and perhaps demystifying) scrutiny of others. Again, as in *The Dampe* and *The Apparition*, Donne imagines a form of symbolic power which cannot bear confrontation or inquiry. The wreath can function as a fetish, as a *sign* of some non-manifest, mystical power, only by being buried or at least partially screened from the potentially skeptical rigor of others' imagined gazes. Like so many of the powers and potencies that Donne's poet-figures wish in various ways to claim or appropriate throughout his work, the band of hair is and remains vulnerable to the other's incongruent desires, to the other's potential for difference. It is not surprising then, that in *The Funerall* the poet directs those who would shroud him to avert their eyes, or, more accurately, to submit their gaze to the poet's own enunciation of the hair's supernatural function. His purpose is to ensure, at least initially, that in spite of his "death" the wreath can assume and retain a positive, articulating force, binding the poet's dead limbs together and preserving his soul-abandoned body from dissolution. For although his inward soul has gone to heaven, the
wreath, his "outward Soule," rescues the body from such leavetaking. Thus, the wreath, when defended against potentially critical appraisal, can mediate against the power of death and against the allied power of being forsaken. As a "Viceroy," it can replace and assume the function of its sovereign--the "inner" soul which has gone to heaven. It also can replace, perhaps, the figure whose sovereign influence has been suggested but deferred (and perhaps suppressed) throughout the stanza: the woman whom we later learn produced the wreath. It is she, it would seem, whose imperial power over the poet has been denied in favor of the wreath's; it is she who has captivated the poet and, at least latently, made his limbes "her Provinces."

But this power, initially, is not admitted by the poet. Though the wreath of hair conventionally suggests an absent love, the poet, throughout the stanza, depicts this wreath as being, in a sense, free-standing. It has been given no origin, nor does the poet mention any "author" who could assume or claim propriety over its meaning. There is, at least by implication, no "other" involved in its production. Consequently the poet himself can articulate and control its significance--which he strives to do. It is through the force of his rhetoric that the wreath assumes, however tentatively and briefly, magical power, serving as an amulet against bodily dissolution, a surrogate for the absent soul, and as a vehicle of symbolic power which abridges the corrupting power of death. This unifying or preservative capacity, however, endures only as long as the poet can
articulate and safeguard the wreath's free-standing symbolic force, only as long as he can bear it with him undisturbed into death. For as soon as he alludes to the woman whom it represents, even if only obliquely in the suggestive phrase "her Provinces," he swerves onto an associational track which leads him, eventually, to vest her with authorial control of the wreath. This change, according to the poet, destroys the wreath's mystical power, for now it comes to signify the other's desire rather than his own, a desire which the poet construes as sadistic:

For if the sinewie thread my braine lets fall
   Through every part,
Can tye those parts, and make mee one of all;
These hairs which upward grew, and strength and art
   Have from a better braine,
Can better do'it; Except she meant that I
   By this should know my pain,
As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemn'd to die.
   (9-16)

The stanza begins with the poet working to justify the unifying power of the wreath. The means through which he tries to assert that power, however, has changed from the previous stanza. Rather than trying to vest the wreath with a magical potency predicated on a belief in the reparative force of symbolization, the poet decides that the wreath's power must be validated more rationally, and so he defends its value through a logic of resemblance and difference, through analogy. That the analogy is
sophistical is not the point. The important aspect of the poet's use of analogy is that it suggests a fairly explicit change in the poet's attitude towards symbolization itself. He no longer believes that the wreath can sustain his beloved's presence or recognition and thereby mitigate his imaginary death. For now he assumes that the wreath needs more "rational" supplementation. Language, even the language of the dead, cannot turn the wreath into a fetish. Thus, as James Bauman notes, the poet tacitly admits to a loss of efficacy in "sacramental, performative language."³⁹ Death, in this poem, does not allow an unequivocal assumption of verbal power.

This turning away from the performative power of language emerges, significantly, in congruence with the poet's increasing acknowledgment of the wreath's origin—his non-mirroring lady. According to the poet's analogy, the hair has unifying power for two reasons: first, as a sort of "sinewie thread" it resembles the nervous system which ties the body together;³⁰ second, because the ringlet's "strength and art" issue from the lady's "better braine," the ringlet functions better in securing the unity of the subject than the analogous threading of nerves which fall "through every part" of the poet's body and bind it together. In both cases, the wreath's power no longer derives from its status as a sign condensing the mystic potencies of language, but instead issues explicitly, as the analogy points out, from its origin in a valued other. This change in the wreath's role as a sign immediately poses a problem for the poet since it implicitly
vests the woman with a proprietary role over the wreath's function. For now rather than serving as a relic, as a commemorative object which possesses an intrinsic, supernatural capacity to heal, it devolves into a sign dependent on the intent of the other for its meaning and function. The woman, the other, becomes the origin and proprietor of its message and semiotic force. Consequently, the wreath comes to manifest, in a rhetoric increasingly laced with anxiety, the other's autonomous will and intent, and not the poet's own. It is a sign of her sense of their relation. And this leads him to vest the wreath with a sadistic, communicative power: "she meant that I/ By this should know my pain,/ As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemned to die." Apparently, because the wreath's meaning is no longer authored by the poet, the wreath itself loses its capacity to function for him as a transitional object (an object which mediates the absence or loss of a beloved other). As "meant" by the woman, the wreath instead becomes the sadistic inverse of such an object, forcing the poet to "know [his] pain." Without the poet's verbal control, the wreath denotes suffering and loss rather than mediated presence. It also indicates, through his projective reading of it as an emblem of the woman's aggressive inclination, the mark of a deadly asymmetry between them, a destructive difference of desires.

The poet registers this asymmetry as a form of imprisonment, a fatal loss of freedom and power. Since the wreath now
insistently recalls for him the woman's sadistic intent, its potential to function as a fetish or commemorative object is limited by its status as a communicatory sign manacled to and disclosing the pain and anger residing at its origin. Whatever else the ringlet may come to be or mean, it cannot, for the poet, free itself in any absolute way from his recollection of it as a sign of the other's desire, and how that desire diverged from or thwarted his. Thus, though the poet unreservedly admitted in the first stanza to wearing the wreath on his arm as if it were a fetish, as soon as he associates it with the woman's intent he sees himself as manacled by it. Rather than exerting a unifying or preservative force, it becomes an adumbration of the poet's death due to the other's autonomy. Bound to a woman who wishes, according to the poet's interpretation of the wreath, only that he should know his pain, captivation becomes for him captivity. As with so many of Donne's other poet-lovers, male vulnerability to woman's amorous powers incites a descent into death. And it is this imbalance of power, woven into the hair-wreath itself, which motivates the poet in the first stanza to attempt to articulate it as a fetish, as a recuperative surrogate for the woman he can't control and who apparently recognize or reflect his desire. But because the poet assumes that the wreath, from its origin, records the other's sadistic intent, the wreath can never, either through magic or verbal force, entirely displace the woman. It always, as a sign, bears threatening traces of the other. Therefore it cannot relieve the asymmetries
or contentions of power which it, ambivalently, signifies—that is, unless the wreath has no true, originary meaning, unless the other's meaning communicated by it is only a guess, only an interpretation, and can be forgotten, suppressed or erased.

The poet suggests this latter possibility immediately after explicating the wreath as a manacle. No longer bound by the woman's supposed intent, the wreath can again become a sort of transitional object, a surrogate for the other herself. In this instance, however, the purpose of fetishizing the wreath is not reparative; instead, the poet uses the wreath as the vehicle for his ambivalent, symbolic revenge:

What ere shee meant by't, bury it with me,
   For since I am
Loves martyr, it might breed idolotrie
If into others hands these Reliques came;
    As 'twas humility
To'afford to it all that a Soule can doe,
    So, 'tis some bravery,
That since you would save none of mee,
    I bury some of you.
      (17-24)

Somehow, for the poet, it ceases to matter what the woman intended by sending the wreath. In his explicit turn towards aggression, her desire and intent lose their definitive force, for he is no longer concerned with being recognized, accepted or loved by her. Instead, he wants to establish a rhetorical mastery over what is left of their relationship. Consequently, the ambiguity of the wreath does not bother him, since it allows the
wreath to bear his meanings. And this opening of signification seems to prompt the poet into redefining another figure formerly laden with the other's intent and power—the figure of his own death. Previously a manifestation of vulnerability and impotence, his death and impending burial now become an abject but rhetorically powerful means of contesting the woman's amorous independence, her unwillingness to mirror his desire. For in death, he can assume some control over her through her surrogate—the wreath. He can symbolically reciprocate her killing of him by taking her token with him into the grave. Consequently, he orders the men who are to inter him to bury the ringlet with him. The reason he states for this directive is to prevent others from treating the wreath as a relic. He doesn't want them to idolatrously (and parodically) vest it with a meaning which the poet himself could not conjure for it. More to the point, he doesn't want them to determine or control its significance or symbolic force. For in order to bury the woman's debilitating allure and autonomy, he must be able to dominate the emblem and iconic surrogate of that power—the "manacle" of hair.

He asserts this domination in the poem's final line, dramatically (and unexpectedly) addressing the woman as he reveals his plan of vengeance: "So, 'tis some bravery,/ That since you would save none of mee, I bury some of you." Patricia Pinka understands this line to reveal that the woman has been present with the poet all along, and that his failure to acknowledge her
presence overtly until the very end of the poem is part of his effort to return her scorn with his. This reading is possible, but it specifically ignores the situational ambiguity that the poet creates. He has not clearly specified why the woman sent the wreath. Was it sent because of a necessary physical separation? Or to symbolize a love which could never be consummated for reasons of propriety? Or perhaps simply to gall a rejected suitor? There are also other possibilities. The point is that the poet does not clearly determine or specify the dramatic situation that produced his rhetorical death, but rather only his relation to it. Whether or not the woman is supposed to be actually present as an auditor is undecidable. The poet could be simply addressing her performatively in order to vest his aggression with a theatrical illusion of immedacy. What is more definite is that the poet speaks to the woman as if she were present only at the very moment in which he explicitly imagines the wreath as a surrogate object for his aggression. The term "you" participates strongly in this conjunction by producing a conspicuous referential slippage between the woman herself and the wreath in the poem's final line. The "you" which had initially seemed indexive, pointing to the woman herself, becomes both incarnational and equivocal, designating both the woman and her more easily "buried" metonym, the ringlet of hair. The poet thus introduces the woman's rhetorical presence only when he can have her identity semiotically dovetail with the wreath's, only
when she herself, in the poet's fancy, can become a *victim* of the poet's anger, buried in and through her symbolic counterpart.

The poet's wish, then, at least as enunciated in the poem, is to bear the woman he desires (and abjects)\(^33\) with him into death, to use death as a means to blend symbolic violence with a macabre preservation of the other's presence. He does not want to destroy the wreath (or the woman) through interment, but rather wishes to embalm and control it (and her). In a sense, he wishes to retain its presence while burying its potential for autonomous or other-authored signification. As a double for the woman, the wreath allows the poet to manipulate his ambivalence towards her. He can love the wreath, have it, preserve it, control it, hate it, and dispatch it without contradiction. By burying the ringlet with him, the poet wants to transport it from the intersubjective realm in which the woman possesses some measure of both verbal and erotic power into a deadened realm of failed, impotent subjectivity where his desire for amorous recognition and potency can be decided on (and in) his terms. Though this is not a realm in which the poet can expect to arouse or provoke the pleasures of mirroring or where he can expect to be *loved*, it is a realm in which his burial of the woman through her surrogate can arrest (in fantasy) her amorously generated power to kill, and thereby realign power, however impotently, in his favor. Her sexual capacity itself, which has been dispersed throughout the poem into "funerary details,"\(^34\) thus is interred by the poet's aggression.\(^35\) In the
grave, apparently, the only thing erotic for the poet is verbal power and the fantasized asymmetry of self and other wrought by imaginary death.

In *The Funerall*, then, the agonistic pleasures of death assume the place of love, and the assumption of symbolic power coupled with sexual renunciation defend against the risks and vulnerabilities of the desire for recognition. The magical surrogacy of the wreath fails to foreclose the poet's wish for its burial since the traces of asymmetry and conflict it evokes cannot be effectively mastered by him except in a sustaining fantasy of death. It is there, in the morbid interval between death and interment, that his symbols can assume the appearance of self-assured power and he can bury his continuing attachment to the woman within what is for him a seductive fantasy of vengeance. But this imaginary inversion of power provides only a partial defense against the threats posed to male intersubjective desires by woman's potential for otherness. For what the poet suggests through his wish to symbolically bury the woman is that his desire to remain attached to a woman who has separated from him requires that both he and his beloved submit to symbolic forces of death, to a rhetoric that depicts sustained coupling as requiring the interment of both parties. Gendered power, for the poet, the power to have his beloved even when she doesn't recognize or reflect his desire, comes only through burial, through an exchange of woman's otherness for the devitalized, forced (and still conflicted) accord of arm and
wreath in the grave. Yet in spite of this displacement of intersubjective attunement by such emblematic coupling, the poet cannot escape linking woman, male desire and corruption. Power, in the poem, can be constructed only through a certain mortification of both self and other, only through the corruption of sexuality and the desire for recognition into an ambivalent, encompassing embrace of death.

Death and the grave, then, as *The Dampe, The Apparition*, and *The Funerall* suggest, often serve Donne's poet-figures as part of the complicated repertory through which they stage their contentions with or assaults upon woman's otherness. Part of the reason for this staging, perhaps, is that the otherness of death is much more easy to moderate or subdue than the otherness of woman. Unlike Shakespeare's Hamlet who constantly reckons with the threatening (and occasionally alluring) otherness of death, Donne's poets embrace and occupy death easily, with only superficial dread. The imagining of death in these poems is neither a rupture with the concerns of life nor an annihilation of self or subjectivity. Instead, it is a means for each poet-figure to purify and rhetorically empower his own desire and intent, whether they be for seduction or vengeance. In this sense, death serves Donne's poet-figures rather than troubling them. Such a casual if often bitter alliance with death also has generic warrant. It was not uncommon in the Petrarchan (or anti-Petrarchan) tradition which Donne both assimilated and powerfully transformed for poets to imagine
posthumous verbal attacks and amorous hauntings as a means to redress their rejection by their lady. Thus, the tradition itself, in a sense Donne's poetic archive, had already neutralized some of death's potential for threatening otherness by making its use a conventional if morbid response to rejection. Death was, in this tradition, often less threatening to embrace than woman.

For Donne, however, embracing death does not effectively suppress or annul his desire to seduce, embrace, assimilate or transform the otherness of woman into desiring recognition. He still wants, as in *The Exstasie* or *The good-morrow*, a relation of symmetry in which the woman's subjectivity is responsive to and reflects his own desire. In these poems of death, however, what he gets is an otherness which must be countered rather than assimilated. In *The D ample*, for example, the poet uses the fiction of his own death and dissection to generate an audaciously offensive (and apparently ineffectual) strategy of seduction which verbally assaults the disdaining woman. Similarly, in *The Funerall*, although the poet cannot make the woman's desire reflect his, he can, through the wreath of hair, symbolically overpower some of the woman's otherness by burying it. There is one poem, however, *The Relique*, in which the imagining of death does not lead explicitly into an attempt to counter woman's otherness through either seduction or more overt aggression. Instead, it depicts a process through which the poet assimilates various forms of otherness and eventually, in dreamy retrospection, imagines a wondrous, ungendered
symmetry with his lover. Through the symbolic magic wrought in
the grave in this poem, Donne transforms funereal detail and the
potential for threatening female otherness into the enchanted
relics of a lost, cherished love.

The poem begins, as did *The Funerall*, with the poet imagining
his corpse becoming the subject of another's gaze. In *The
Relique*, however, the fictive observer is a gravedigger rather
than an attendant coming to shroud the cadaver, and the
emblematic conjunction of objects which the poet supposes will
capture the observer's attention is "A bracelet of bright haire
about the bone" (6) rather than "That subtile wreath of haire,
which crowns my arme."

When my grave is broke up againe
Some second ghost to entertaine,
(For graves have learn'd that woman-head
To be to more than one a Bed)
And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright haire about the bone,
Will he not let's us alone,
And thinke that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their soules, at the last busie day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

(1-11)

The stanza begins in an anticipatory fantasy, envisioning a
moment in which the quiet of death is broken up by the desire of
another. A sexton, having come to inter a second corpse in the
burial plot already occupied by the poet, digs out the grave,
exposing the poet's bones to external scrutiny. This exposure of
his fictive "death" produces a number of effects in the poem. First, it leads the poet to imagine the corpse to be buried as a "second ghost" who will share the narrow confines of his grave, figuratively animating this new, intruding cadaver with a sense of consciousness, of otherness. His locution also vests the grave itself with an aura of conviviality since it has become a place in which this other "ghost" can be entertained. The poet's use of the term "ghost" to designate the imaginary, intruding corpse animates the scene in another way as well. In contemporary idiom, the term "ghost" could indicate either "guest," a visitor, or, less commonly, "ghost." Thus the new "ghost," at least latently, can also be construed as a ghost, that is, as the spectral residue of the otherness of the other which survives death. Consequently, the disturbance of the supposed quiet of death by the introduction of this ghostly other reinforces Donne's frequent use of death as a state that mirrors, transforms and continues to be engaged with the realm of the living, the realm of the other.

Donne's use of death as means to engage or defend against the power of the other surfaces more conspicuously as his "dead" poet changes his focus from the anticipated intrusion of some "second ghost" into the grave to a misogynous attack on women: "For graves have learn'd that woman-head/ To be to more than one a bed." For the poet, otherness, even when initially ungendered (the "second ghost" has no gender), leads uncannily to an attack on woman's supposed promiscuity. Apparently the idea of sharing the grave with an other, for the poet, conjures the
allied but different notion of being shared sexually, a common anxiety in Donne's love poetry. The grave, like woman, is promiscuous, submitting the poet to an otherness which is not controlled by his desire. It is not the grave itself or its new "ghost," however, that he chooses to attack, but woman in general--specifically, woman's sexual autonomy. He registers his unease with this autonomy by designating all women's potential for sexual license through the generic term "woman-head." This term serves two purposes: first, its abstraction tends to distance and mediate woman's potential for sexual freedom as a general rather than personal phenomenon, making it a more suitable subject for male cynicism and misogyny; second, the term recalls and ironically displaces the term "maidenhead," a contemporary designation for female virginity. Thus, "woman-head," at least as the poet uses it, defines woman by sexual license, by her threatening ability "To be to more then one a bed." Woman's sexuality, then, like the invasion of the grave by the sexton, suggests an autonomy that the poet finds disruptive.

It is at this moment, immediately after the poet sardonically registers his aversion to woman's generic potential for sexual freedom, that he discloses, through the gaze of the sexton, the emblematic figure through which he will try to assimilate and neutralize this unsettling intrusion of otherness--the "bracelet of bright hair about the bone." Unlike The Funerall, where the poet ultimately emphasized that the "subtile wreath of hair" which he had hoped would function as a fetish was instead a sign,
an ambiguous record of his lady's asymmetrical intent and desire, the "bracelet" here explicitly functions as an emblem, as an iconic "device" whose formal properties evoke more gratifying possibilities of meaning. On the one hand, the poet hopes that when the sexton sees the emblem he will "thinke" of it as a "loving couple" and act accordingly, that is, leave the "couple" suggested by it alone. If he does so, the emblem will have effectively eliminated two imaginary intrusions of otherness upon the poet: first, the sexton's violation of the grave with his digging and his gaze; and second, the introduction of an other consciousness, a "second ghost," into the poet's burial bed.

Through the bracelet, the sexton can "see" a loving couple and conform his desire, in a sense, to theirs. He can recognize their wish to remain undisturbed by others and attune his actions to their imaginary desires. The emblematic bracelet also signifies the poet's wish that he be able to meet and "make a little stay" with his beloved on "the last busy day"--the day of resurrection and judgment. Thus, the bracelet implicitly symbolizes a desired escape from loss through death which allows for the possibility of a restoration of attunement and love. There is a touch of irreverence, however, in this desire, for the poet hopes, modestly but resolutely, to defer the call (and desire) of God with all its attendant bustle for the brief calm of renewed presence. The bracelet, then, for the poet, augurs and represents an imaginary future in which various possibilities of loss connected to
otherness can be deferred or defended against by the 
symbolization of love.

The very form of the bracelet serves this mediating function. 
Patricia Pinka has noted that the "bracelet of hair about the 
bone" formally resembles the Greek letter theta, the first letter 
in thanatos, the Greek word for death. In addition, the 
penetration of a "female" circle by a male "bone" graphically 
signifies sexual coupling. Thus, the bracelet connotes both 
sexuality and death and, more importantly, submits each to a 
formal assimilation. Donne's poet, through the emblem of the 
bracelet, subsumes the otherness of sexuality and death within 
the less troubling confines of a stable form. As signified by the 
bracelet, sexual coupling is reduced to a sexual couple, and bodily 
surcease and corruption becomes the immaculate deadness of the 
letter, of writing. In this sense, the bracelet is a subtle 
inversion of the fetishized hair-wreath of The Funerall, for the 
bracelet's ideal purpose, unlike the wreath's, is not to substitute 
for a lost or non-mirroring presence, or even to suggest an 
other's intent or desire. Instead, the poet uses it to imagine the 
containment of loss, sexuality and annihilation within the stasis 
of a manifestly formal (iconic) representation, and to suggest 
the power of writing (taken in its broadest sense) to 
circumscribe processes which manifest, for Donne's poet, 
troubling aspects of woman's otherness.

This emphasis on writing emerges more explicitly in the 
poem's second stanza. The poet, attempting to stop the possible
conversion of the bracelet and bone into "Reliques" by the imaginary sexton or his people, suggests that in such a land of "mis-devotion" additional writing must be used to supplement and define the emblem and its meaning. The poem itself, "this paper" (21), provides this necessary supplement:

        If this fall in a time, or land,
        Where mis-devotion doth command,
        Then, he that digges us up, will bring
        Us, to the Bishop, and the King,
        To make us Reliques; then
        Thou shalt be'a Mary Magdalene, and I
        A something else thereby;
        All women shall adore us, and some men;
        And since at such time, miracles are sought,
        I would have that age by this paper taught
        What miracles wee harmelessse lovers wrought.
        (11-22)

The land of "mis-devotion," a land in which superstition can convert hair and skeletal remains into relics, is a land of magical representation, a land in which resemblance involves a reproduction of identity and relics become mystical surrogates for lost objects of adoration. In such a land, symbols are incarnational rather than emblematic. The bracelet and bone, even in the poet's own language, coalesce with the poet and his lady; they become "us." Almost simultaneously, the poet addresses his lady as "thou," dramatically suggesting her presence, and then identifies her as "a Mary Magdalene" and himself as "a something else thereby," an apparently self-censored allusion to Jesus Christ. Through "mis-devotion," then,
the poet himself implicitly becomes the Word, the paradigm of incarnational language. The modest tension in the first stanza between the articulation of the emblem as an incarnation of the poet and his lover in line 7 and its later designation as a "device," is repeated here, but in a more explicit, exaggerated form. Through the emblem, the poet and his lady become the relics of a mythic love that did not require sexual consummation, the apocryphal love of Mary Magdalene and Jesus. They become incarnations of their spiritual forbears. This blasphemous identification, however, is bracketed by the fact that the poet explicitly writes that such an identification is "mis-devotion;" that is, it is an effect of the superstitious confusion of an emblem or simulacrum with what it signifies or represents. Though he welcomes the effect of such "mis-devotion"--his and his lady's adoration by "all women" and "some men"--he nevertheless desires through "this paper," his poem, to submit such veneration to the truth of his writing. This truth, however, even though it relates the lovers' "miracles," is ultimately demystifying, for it interposes writing between the emblem and its interpretation, and marks chronological distance. In fact, it marginalizes the emblem itself, pointing to the lovers' "miracles" themselves rather than to the bracelet and bone, their emblematic vestige. Thus, in a sense, the emblem (and the "other" interpretations which it inevitably licenses) is displaced and assimilated by the poem itself which serves, figuratively, as
its caption; the "reliques" thus become, at least in the poet's eyes, assimilated within written narrative.

This shift in focus from emblem to text parallels a second shift that occurs at the same point in the poem: the shift from fantasy to reminiscence, from projection to an idealized history. The emblem, having subsumed death and sexuality within itself, disappears and is replaced by the poet's narrative recollection in which his and his lady's perfectly symmetrical love miraculously avoids the problems and threats posed by gendered difference and woman's potential for sexual autonomy. In fact, in this idyllic, amorous past, gender has vanished altogether:

    First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
    Yet know not what wee lov'd, nor why,
    Difference of sex no more wee know,
    Then our Guardian Angells doe;
    Coming and going, wee
    Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales;
    Our hands n'er toucht the sealles,
    Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free:
    These miracles wee did; but now alas,
    All measure, and all language, I should pass,
    Should I tell what a miracle shee was.

(23-33)

The poet regards this depiction of love as replete with miracles for a number of reasons. First, the lovers' pleasures are oral rather than genital, defining sexual contact and gratification through a language of repetitive feeding rather than according to a teleology of self-voiding consummation. Male anxieties about phallic expenditure, vulnerability and performance which surface
often in Donne's poems are alleviated here by a sexual paradigm which imagines amorous contact as "meales," as sustaining and nutritive refreshment, not as an analogue of death. Significantly, the decision to avoid genital contact (touching the "seales") is conscious and mutual, suggesting an attunement of desire between the partners. Neither the poet nor his lover, though perhaps tempted by "natural" lusts, is willing to violate the hymeneal sign which authoritatively separates oral from genital pleasures and which puts intercourse under stricture. Though nature has freed all, "late law" invents proscriptions which the poet and his lover, through the miracle of their active, mirroring love and recognition, extemporaneously heed. In the bliss of their symmetry, coition becomes, at the very least, nonessential. In fact, perfect symmetry requires that genital sex be interdicted since such attunement and mirroring entails, according to the poet, the suspension of gendered differences: "Difference of sex no more wee knew,/ Then our Guardian Angells doe." Symmetry thus displaces anatomy as the author of their relation, and a similarity of desire, rather than threatening projections of autonomy and opposition, serves as its content.

In this idyllic narrative there is no need for "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone" as a symbolic mediator since no troubling (or deadly) otherness, sexual or otherwise, overtly remains. The poet emphasizes this throughout his recollection by continually referring to his lover and himself as "wee," lexically uniting them as the composite subject of identical actions and
desires. Both "lov'd well and faithfully" (a miracle in itself for one of Donne's poet-figures who almost invariably see the threat of infidelity in even the most assured love). Both were enthralled by a love which according to the poet had no identifiable object and no discernible explanation: "Yet [we] knew not what wee lov'd, nor why." In this mysterious, loving symmetry, the conventional, eroticized object of love (the other) has apparently become inscrutable, unknown. Unlike The Extasie, a poem in which an ideal, specular love is imagined as revelatory ["This Extasie doth unperplex/ (We said) and tell us what we love,/ Wee see by this it was not sexe,/ Wee see, we saw not what did move . . . ."(29-32)], in The Relique a similar love produces no such revelations. The difference, it would seem, is that in The Extasie, there is an explicit and, for the poet, necessary semiotic relation between loving symmetry and the body: "Loves mysteries in the soules doe grow,/ But yet the body is his booke" (71-72). Love, even specular love, is incomplete without the graphic legibility and penetrability of bodies. In The Relique, however, in spite of its conversion of love to "this paper," to a textual body, neither love nor the woman herself can be verbally or cognitively known. The poet presses this point in the poem's final lines where he specifically imagines his lady as surpassing all means of defining her appeal: "All measure, and all language, I should passe,/ Should I tell what a miracle shee was" (32-33). Throughout the stanza, the poet mystifies the particularity of the object (or other) in favor of
emphasizing the adoring, reflexive relation itself. Both lovers, according to the poet, do not love any thing; rather, they love their mirroring relation as such, the phenomenon of being reflected and recognized. Both love, at least in the poet's eyes, an appearance of the other which assimilates or annuls all forms of difference between them. The other as other, the other as body and the other as an object of visual fascination, as "things/Extreme, and scaterring bright" (Aire and Angels, 22), dissolves into this recollected appearance.

But the poet's mystification of the object of love goes beyond merely emphasizing the symmetry of the lovers' actions and desires. It also serves to annul part of the power that Donne and much of the Petrarchan tradition thought woman possessed--the power to captivate and even coerce male desire through their physical appearance. For Donne and many of his contemporaries, women did not simply threaten men with their autonomy or subjectivity; they also threatened men specifically as objects. Donne himself, in The Autumnall, imagines the erotic appeal of women as possessing an exaggerated power which is violent, enthralling and domineering: "Yong Beauties force our love, and that's a rape" (3). In loving symmetry, however, at least as Donne's poet articulates it in The Relique, male desire is freed from the risk of thralldom to woman's potentially ravishing appearance. The poet can love, quite simply, his lady's spontaneous reflections of his desires. His love, as he articulates it, has nothing to do with her visual allure. And
because both lovers, according to the poet, have incorporated within their love a certain mystical unknowing with regard to the other, they escape the erotic (or, in a more Petrarchan vein, aesthetic) captivation that turns love into a mixture of coercion, obsession and debasement--into a from of death. They are thus able to avoid loving the other as a fetish to be dominated. Consequently, the other disappears as an amorous object, and appears instead as an amorous reflection, allowing a more complete (perhaps miraculous) assimilation of the otherness of the other than conventional, erotic attachment would allow.

Such a recollection of loving symmetry, however, as the final lines of the poem show, is not enough by itself to allow Donne's poet to completely embrace his beloved's otherness. For in spite of her unconditional, even mystical, sharing of the poet's desire, the woman stays materially different from the poet. She can still be lost; she can even, perhaps, die: "These miracles wee did; but now alas, / All measure, and all language I should pass, / Should I tell what a miracle shee was" (31-33). For the poet, loving symmetry, in spite of its potential for imaginary bliss, tacitly remains in thrall to the variability, difference or inconstancy of the other. The shared miracles of the past thus remain subject to the more chastened possibilities of the present. Through the strong ceasura in line 31 and the fatal "but" which immediately follows it, the poet clearly marks a break between the the present and the past, separating his recollection of loving symmetry from a more distanced, more plaintive realm
of loss. The ceasura also marks another break. In the recollection of symmetry which leads up to it, the woman and the man submit themselves to a mutual assimilation. The man mirrors the woman and the woman mirrors the man. Each submits their own desires to the desire of the other. Such was the miracle of their love. After the ceasura, however, assimilation continues, but in a much different form. The poet now suggests that there is a distance not only between his lover and himself, but between the woman and language as well. Through her passing, she moves from a poetic realm of engagement, representation and resemblance to a realm in which signs can only function indexively. Language in this realm can only point to the woman; it cannot represent her. There can be, then, no mediation or recovery of her presence for signs as such are inadequate to the task. Even the emblematic "device" of the bracelet of hair would be deficient in this regard. The poet's delicate "alas" registers this sense of irrevocable loss, and prepares the way for the fairly brutal "was" which ends the poem with a final articulation of the woman's passing.

This view of language is ironic in two senses. First, it seems to contradict the poet's assertion at the end of the second stanza that "this paper," the poem itself, would be able to teach anyone who saw the bracelet of bright hair about the bone "What miracles wee harmeleesse lovers wrought." With regard to the past, apparently, language could be representational, acting as a necessary supplement to the emblem itself, displacing its static,
heterosexual version of coupling with a more miraculous version, one which "knew" neither "Difference of sex" or genital contact itself. Apparently, it is only the woman herself, and not the imaginary relation between her and the poet, that eludes representation. Second, in spite of the mournful tone signaled by the poet's "alas," the woman's transcendant escape from presence and signification registers, at least in part, as a triumph as well as a loss. As Patricia Pinka has suggested, there is a note of celebration in the woman's passing from the reach of language. The death of the woman, paradoxically, seems to be a gain for the poet as well as a loss. There is a certain satisfaction as well as wistful sadness in his evocation of his lover's surpassing wonder.

Part of this pleasure has to do with the poet's use of his lover's transcendent virtues in order to ratify his own commemoration of her. Pinka, who sees in Donne's poet "an inordinate desire for approval and glorification," argues that his "full happiness depends on some public acknowledgment and acclaim." In this sense, the poet imagines the woman as surpassing signification in order to certify her consummate value, attain acknowledgment and also, perhaps, to avoid the "mis-devotion" that attended the relics in the second stanza. As dead but transcendent, the woman cannot be appropriated by others, either verbally or otherwise. Since she eludes representation, she has no appearance outside of the poet's indexive language, and therefore cannot become the object of
others' desire. She can still elicit admiration, but only through the poet's commemoration of her. Admiring her becomes the same thing as admiring the poem itself. Thus her death and transcendence have a paradoxical effect: they assimilate the woman entirely within the poet's discourse. She disappears entirely as an other (as a separate, imaginary subject), and persists only as the focal but absent figure of the poet's epideictic praise.

Perhaps this total assimilation of the woman as other is the final element of pleasure in the poet's ambivalent celebration of her passing. Unlike poems such as *The Nocturnall* or *A Valediction of weeping* where Donne connects loss with disquieting forms of annihilation, nowhere in this poem does the poet overtly imagine a similar threat. Instead, even in the opening stanza when he imagines himself as dead, the poet's tone is assured, as if there must be some semiotic "device" such as "the bracelet of bright hair about the bone" to mediate his lover's absence. And even though the bracelet did not properly ameliorate loss since it required "this paper" as a necessary supplement, it does suggest the poet's belief that loss, somehow, can be controlled. Paradoxically, however, it is neither verbalization nor symbolization as such which ultimately empowers the poet; it is the woman's death which provides the means for his eventual mastery. While the woman is alive, even in the miracle of loving symmetry, she can still potentially resist, disrupt or reject male desire. She can, as the end of the poem makes clear,
die if nothing else. But after death, she loses her power as a subject to dominate her lover. She can no longer kill him sexually; she cannot exchange him for another lover; she cannot change in her response to his desires; in death, her autonomy and power to resist male desire is reduced to absence. Thus, though she no longer can mirror her lover or offer recognition, she cannot enthrall or threaten him either. She can do nothing but disappear into the crypt of the poet's writing.\textsuperscript{45}

This is precisely what happens in final stanza. Up to the ceasura in line 31, the poet revels in his recollection of his and his beloved's specular love, in their dynamic and mutual reduction of otherness. After the ceasura, however, his focus changes from recounting their symmetry as a couple to attempting to articulate and display her recollected \textit{value}. He is no longer interested in recovering a sense of her presence; rather his desire seems to be to treasure her precisely as lost. His emphasis is entirely on what she \textit{was}, relegating any capacity she might have had for inconstancy, autonomy or betrayal, any capacity she might have had to disrupt the perfect symmetry of their love, to an irre recuperable past. In her present, posthumous ascendancy, neither writing nor language can reproduce her. She transcends representation, and therefore can no longer dynamically engage or be engaged by the poet. Instead, he can only gesture towards her as a surpassing but absent ideal, as an unfathomable figure unable to intrude whatever otherness she might still possess upon the assimilative power of his writing. Through her
passing, through her death, she loses the threatening power of her otherness, obviating the poet's rhetorical need to embrace death himself. Because she mirrored him ideally and because she has passed, the poet can imagine the inherently vulnerable pleasures of erotic captivation (even when ungendered) yielding to the more stable, more circumscribed and finally more conventional pleasures of poetic articulation. Abetting that shift, given Donne's powerful poetic desire, even in fantasies of death, to engage the other, is, perhaps, her most important miracle.

It is ironic, nevertheless, that Donne should end a poem which so enchantingly articulates the mystery and delight of a mutual, mirroring love with a celebration, however ambivalent, of his lover's death. Norman Holland, however, reading through the strongly dualistic lens of psychoanalytic drive theory, is not surprised. He argues that the poem as a whole is an attempt to sublimate what he sees as the deep reservoir of aggression feeding Donne's poetics of love. He views the woman's death as the final gesture in that process: "the love-death in The Relic expresses love but also murder, while the mysticism acts as a distancing and sublimation." Holland further suggests that the theme of the poem is "love mastering aggression." The problem in this poem (and in Donne's love poetry taken as a whole), however, is not aggression per se, as Holland would have it, but the vulnerabilities in the male subject and in the dance of recognition which can be elicited and exposed by the potential
for otherness in women. Donne's poet does not *murder* his lover, as Holland suggests, even figuratively. Instead, he ambivalently, even mournfully, welcomes her death, since her death hallows his recollection of their loving symmetry and forecloses the possible emergence of most of the threatening elements which Donne's poets habitually project on female otherness (autonomy, visual enthrallment, sexual promiscuity and betrayal, the ability to dominate male desire and performance). In death, she cannot change her desire and, therefore, even though lost both perceptually and representationally in a necessarily fatal transcendence, she can continue to sustain the poet's recollection of their perfect, specular love. By dying, she does not have to *deviate* from the poet's desire. Their specular love is broken by separation, not difference. Her death, finally, obviates the need for his.

In *The Relique*, then, Donne's poet condenses and manifests certain facets of the characteristic ambivalence towards women, towards the female other, that pervades almost all of Donne's love poetry. Unlike Petrarch and the majority of his followers, however, this ambivalence does not stem merely from women's power to captivate and reject men, to enthrall male desire and then thwart its satisfaction. Instead, Donne's ambivalence arises from a more complicated engagement with women as others. His desire, fundamentally, is specular. Only rarely does Donne, through his poet-figures, focus on the visual allure of a prospective or past lover.\(^{49}\) Instead, he habitually concentrates
on whether a given woman has, can or will reflect his poet-figur's desires. This desire for recognition empowers women in subtle and complicated ways, giving allure and force to their otherness. Since the dynamics of recognition require both engagement with and attentiveness to the other's desire, it forces Donne to entertain (or disavow) a certain level of vulnerability to women. His poet-figures must carefully attend to the woman they wish to mirror them, responding, even when rejected, to the force of the woman's desire. The female other is not resolutely distanced, as is common in the Petrarchan tradition, but rather is insistently engaged in fairly nuanced interactions. Further, the dynamics of recognition require that coupling be, in some sense, dynamic, and this requires possibilities of change and conflict which are, at least in part, controlled by the woman as well as the man. Finally, the desire for recognition empowers women sexually. Because men and women are biologically asymmetrical, sexual coupling can only approximate specular pleasures. And since Donne often associates male sexuality and climax with death, an association which woman's sexuality escapes, such an approximation frequently proves troubling for him. Women, through sex, can thus expose what Donne perceives as male vulnerability.

Donne's enthrallment with mirroring is thus two-edged. On the one hand, it provides the prospect of rapturous pleasures, miracles of love, and gender-erasing symmetries, involving Donne's poetic subjects with the female other in ways which
offer the possibility of fulfilling his version of male desire. On the other hand, however, since the women Donne fancies as means to reflect his desires are empowered by the dynamics of mirroring and recognition itself, they acquire through that very process possibilities of autonomy, domination and otherness that make them congenital threats to any such dreams or desires. They can, in effect, shatter the imaginary mirror which Donne wants them to be. Woman, then, as a speculum, holds out two, contradictory promises: she can recognize and mirror the male subject, reducing otherness through the interactive attunement of desire; and she can differ from or resist the poet and his projections, deferring or even obliterating his dream of symmetry. It is this second possibility which provokes in Donne his frequently misogynous attempts to assert his power over woman, to claim domination. In the absence or potential loss of symmetry, he fights, often desperately, often cynically, often roguishly, for power, even if such a fight involves his own imaginary embracing of death or the death of the other. He fights, perhaps, because in the absence of mirroring, any attention from the other, even contempt, is better than nothing.

The dynamics of recognition, then, at least as Donne imagines them, produce woman as the subject of male desire. Because recognition is contingent on the responsiveness of the other, the male poetic subject, in his desire for specular pleasures, must contend with woman's desire, for the fulfillment of his desire requires at least the appearance that her desires reflect his. She
must, in some sense, however imaginary, authorize his wants. When she does, she produces a blissful interanimation of desire and reciprocal affirmation that allays, at least temporarily, the male subject's perpetual longing for recognition and reflection. In women's intersubjective responsiveness he finds the validation he craves for his own agency and authorship, for his own fragile status as a subject. Woman's subjectivity, however, as even The Relique suggests, is not fully contained by memories or dreams of loving symmetry. Her desire always threatens to follow its own path, a path of otherness and difference which Donne construes as a path of either domination or death. It is on this path that reciprocity and mutual authorization disappear into an intersubjective realm marked by male anger, rivalry, impotence, grief and dreams of sexual dominion. It is on this troubled path that the dance of love and recognition, a dance of bliss, changes into a danse macabre, and the male subject dies to control the remains of love.

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1 Poems such as The Anagram with its dildoes and bedstaves and Communitie with its portrayal of women as consumable and disposable pieces of meat also involve symbolic violence. The difference is that in the poems in which death is embraced or used rhetorically, this violence is directed towards another subject. In the poems mentioned above, the violent images are meant for male consumption and
not overtly to provoke or force recognition from an imagined other. It is through
death that symbolic violence, for Donne, becomes explicitly intersubjective, that it
becomes a sort of weapon.

2A Valediction forbidding mourning is an obvious exception to this analysis, except
that even in that poem the conscious denial of loss functions in much the same way
as the rhetoric of death I am now considering. By renouncing loss, the lovers
create a difference between it and separation, which grants the figure of the
compass its mediating force.

3See, for example, poems 2, 11, 18, 44, 46, 126, 278-279 in Petrarch's Lyric
Harvard U. Press, 1976. As these poems show, Petrarch uses the connection
between love and death in a wide range of contexts. William Kerrigan and Gordon
Braden have suggested that framing love through metaphors of death appealed to
Petrarch because it helped to engender a transformation that he desired: from
spoken intimacy to written recapitulation and reminiscence; from a realm of
conflicted engagement to a realm in which poetry functioned to memorialize Laura
and her authorial idolator—and to inter them in the crypt of writing (The Idea of
the Renaissance, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1989, p. 160-163; for an
example from one of Donne's contemporaries of the interplay of poetic
memorialization, love and death, see Shakespeare's sonnet 81, Or I shall live your
epitaph to make). Erotic love, for Petrarch, entails, in a sense, two interrelated
deaths: a deadly outpouring of the male subject whose desire is (or at least can
be) rejected; and a potential death of the real which must be displaced by poetic
iteration.


Arthur Marotti suggests that such a connection between love, power and death, particularly among "Inns of Court gentlemen" such as Donne, was a direct consequence of thwarted social ambition. The rhetoric of amorous death was a displacement of the real economic or social "death" suffered by many such gentlemen due to a relative dearth of suitably rewarding social and political positions (*John Donne, Coterie Poet*, Madison: U. Wisconsin Press, 1986, p. 10-11, 28, 72). Marotti's sense of causation, however, is problematic. One could argue that the need for social advancement and prestige was, at least in part, produced by real or more archaic failures in the private realm of love and attachment. The priority of the political and the social realm as causes of the poetry is assumed rather than proved.

Women, too, could "die," sexually, though this death often seemed to be more a result of aggressive male assault rather than depletion or dissipation. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example, in a somewhat roguish exchange between Claudio and Don Pedro, the latter formulates Benedick's love interest as doomed to be "buried" by him sexually:
Claudio: Nay, but I know one who loves him.
Don Pedro: That I would know too. I warrant, one that know him not.
Claudio: Yes, and his ill conditions; and in spite of all, dies for him.
Don Pedro: She shall be buried with her face upwards.

(3. 2. 59-65)

Cited from *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, ed., Sylvan Barnet, New York:

9Quoted from *Shakespeare's sonnets*, ed., Wayne Booth, New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1977, sonnet 129, In 1-2. Donne himself calls attention to the traditional nature of this notion of sex as murderously dissipating in *Farewell to love*: "each such Act, they say,/_Diminisheth the length of life a day" (24-25).

10This is suggested by Booth, 443.

11Donne himself does get similarly macabre on occasion. In *The Autumnall*, for example, the poet-figure compares old women to deaths-heads: "Name not these living *Deaths-heads* unto mee,/_For these not *Ancient*, but *Antique* be . . . ." (43-44).


13I use Suckling's name intentionally here to label his poetic voice since I don't sense the same "ventriloquism," the same performative difference between author and the "author position" as defined by the poetry, as occurs in Donne.

14Beth Anne Bassein argues that such a figuration of woman is an "externalization of the body-soul dichotomy projected along gender lines" (*Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984, p. 20).
Kerrigan and Braden suggest that the turn towards a poetics of consummation rather than frustrated yearning in the seventeenth century was due to the increasing influence of Ovid on poets of the period (Idea, p. 174-177). Donne, at times, does seem to make use of Ovidian models, but appropriates them in a way which bends them to his own interests.

Christopher Ricks, as I have mentioned previously, suggests that Donne "fiercely eroticized his revulsion from the erotic" ("Donne After Love," in Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons, ed. Elaine Scarry, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1988, p. 64). He adds that the endings of many of Donne's poems, which Ricks finds aesthetically unsatisfactory, relate to "orgasm's affiliation with death" (49). Donne, however, is much more ambivalent towards the erotic and towards death than Ricks' formulations allow.

Donne's articulations of the relation between "nature" and sexuality are not consistent. Though "nature" seems to inhibit male eroticism in Farewell to Love, it does precisely the opposite in the elegy Variety, making women open and attractive (15-20) and allowing men multiple partners (37-44). It is "opinion," not nature, which limits sexual enjoyment (49-56). See also The Relique (30). For Donne, of course, consistency is not at issue. Terms and concepts conform to his particular arguments, not vice versa. Language, for Donne, is not solid, but rather, at times, melts into air.

See Kerrigan and Braden, p. 169-171, for an analysis of the phenomenon in relation to Petrarch himself.

In The Canonization, for example, a poem which, as I have argued in chapter 3, incorporates and rewrites the Petrarchan drive towards memorialization, dying (here sexual) suggests a transforming intensification in the lover's relation, not
distance: "Wee dye and rise the same, and prove/ Mysterious by this love" (26-27). In the following stanza, the poet chooses to emphasize the negative aspects of such a death: "Wee can dye by it, if not live by love" (28). This emphasis prepares the way for the poet's Petrarchan desire to memorialize his love which immediately follows: "And if unfit for tombes and hearse/ Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse" (28-29). But Donne's poet does not end there. He goes on to imagine that "We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes" (32), framing poetic enunciation as dually authored, as issuing from and enclosing relational intensity. That the poet goes on in the very next lines to use funereal rhetoric to further specify the process of memorialization ["As well a well wrought urn becomes/ The greatest ashes, as halfe acre tombes" (33-34)] forcefully manifests that for Donne, the rhetoric of relational intensity and death are uncannily compatible if not cohesive. Death, for Donne, even in a poem that incorporates Petrarchan conventions, does not necessarily mean distance or annihilation.

20For an analysis of the pictorial representation of such anatomies during the late Renaissance, see Thomas Laquer, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1990, p. 70-82.

21Again, see Laquer for the structures of power operating in representations of dissections during the period, p. 70-82.

22For a more detailed discussion of the relation of appearances to seduction, refer to chapter 2.

23For an analysis of seduction and its relation to "law," see chapter 2.

24The words are from the elegy, On his Mistris, Ln. 4.

25The pattern of seduction here is similar to the one I analyzed in Richard III in chapter 2.
Guss notes that apparitions and amorous hauntings are common motifs in poems of the Petrarchan tradition (54-56).

James S. Baumlin, in a reading which partially anticipates my own, calls attention to the disjunction between the wreath of hair as an emblem and "the poet's own inability to read the lady's intentions" (John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse, Columbus: U. Missouri Press, 1991, p. 219). He sees love in the poem as being a semiotic system disabled by the "failure of words" (173). The poem, according to Baumlin, opens with a world of relics and the magic of faithful love only to subvert if not abolish these ideals as it proceeds, disclosing the failure of "sacramental, performative language" (173) to displace loss in the poem. I would add, however, that the sudden use of the second person in the final line of the poem suggests a continuing desire for a performative power in language, one focused, in the absence of reciprocated love or captivity, on power.


Baumlin, 173.

The poet's analogy uses the notion that resemblances between things are not arbitrary, but indicate truths about the things in question. In this sense, his argumentation is still not rational in the modern sense, but rather attains its "logic" through a historically influenced belief in the power of resemblances (see Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, New York: Vintage, 1973, p. 17-77). This ordering of things was in the process of change during the period in which Donne wrote although it still functions, at times, even now.
The notion of a transitional object comes from D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 1-25. See also the explanation by Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis in *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Norton, 1973. Laplanche and Pontalis, following Winnicott, see the transitional object as a "halfway house between subjective and objective," as belonging to "the sphere of illusion " (465, their emphasis) but as moving the subject towards reality-testing while mitigating the pain of loss. It allows "the child to make the transition from the first oral relationship with the mother to the 'true object-relationship'" (464). This function persists in modified forms throughout adulthood.


Julia Kristeva has argued that abjection consists of separating the self from the "not me," a primitive means of assuming subjectivity by differentiating the self from its others and wastes (*The Powers of Horror*, trans., Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia U. Press, 1982, p. 1-5). Donne's poet, still ambivalently attached to what he wishes to exclude, expel or kill, entangles abjection with incorporation and violence. For as he articulates in the poem's first stanza, his subjectivity depends on the preservation of the woman as well as on her rejection and and burial.

Pinka, 98.

The poet's "burial" of the wreath resonates with latent sexual connotations. There is a hint that burying the wreath symbolically suggests and disavows the desire to bury the woman sexually. Informing this connotation is a fantasy of male power in which male sexual aggression, when empowered by staging its own death,
can transform female sexuality into an interred relic, into a sign circumscribed by male anxiety and anger.

36See, for example, the graveyard scene that opens Act V or Hamlet's famous soliloquy pondering the efficacy of suicide (3. 1. 56-82). For Hamlet there is a "dread of something after death./ The undiscovered country" which "makes us rather bear those ills we have,/ Than fly to others that we know not of" (The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed., Sylvan Barnet, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972, 3. 1. 78-79, 81-82). For Hamlet, death constitutes, at least potentially, a rupture from life. Such was not necessarily the case for Donne (though there is more than a hint of annihilationism in a poem such as A Hymne to God the Father).

37Arnold Stein has noted that in Donne's religious poems, death provides his poet-figures with the "liberties . . . of a special theater in which the actor-author-spectator performs" (The House of Death: Messages from the English Renaissance, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1986, p. 94). Without accepting Stein's conclusions about the role of death in Donne's poetry, I would suggest that this creation of a "special theater" through figures of death occurs in the poems which I have analyzed in this chapter. Stein also suggests that although Donne is influenced by late medieval representations of death, he generally conceives of death as a life-long, pandemic process. As Donne himself noted in a sermon through a locution which effectively neutralizes the potentially threatening otherness of death: "There is nothing so neare Immortality, as to die daily; for not to feele death is Immortality; and onely he shall never feele death, that is exercised in the continual Meditation thereof; Continual Mortification is Immortality" (The Sermons of John Donne, 10 vol., ed., George R. Potter and Evelyn Simpson,

"Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that winding sheete, for wee come to seeke a grave . . ." (vol. 10, p. 233). Donne's rhetoric in these passages participates in what Philippe Aries has identified as a cultural "devaluation of the moment of death" which occurred in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Aries, writers (particulary religious writers), rather than representing death as a radical break from life, sought to disseminate death throughout the course of daily existence (*The Hour of our Death*, trans., Helen Weaver, New York: Vintage, 1982, p. 308). This attempt to incorporate the otherness of death within the contours of daily life mirrors, in a strange sense, the embracing of death in the poems being discussed.

Guss states that the preservation of a poetic voice beyond death occurs with some frequency in the Petrarchan tradition (54-56).

QED, Compact ed., vol. I, p. 1138-39. The pun is also reinforced by the fact that "ghost" was not the most conventional spelling of the word "guest" by Donne's contemporaries (vol. I, 1123-24).

Pinka, 68.

The notion that a signifier separates the oral and genital realm resonates with Lacan's belief that the verbal signifier is what differentiates the Imaginary order from the Symbolic (see Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Urbana: U. Illinois Press, 1987, p. 53-58, who tries to systematize Lacan's diverse articulations on this issue). For Donne, however, sexual renunciation is not merely a result of symbolic castration, but rather an effect of
the interference between phallic performance and what Lacan might refer to as the captivating aspects of specular pleasures. His desire for mirroring, itself an effect of symbolization, is disrupted by genital sexuality itself (and its involvement in triangulated dynamics of power) and not simply by the possibility of castration however symbolic.

42 Thomas Lacquer's assertion that culture rather than anatomy has always defined "sex" and "gender" is not at issue here (Making Sex). Sexual "anatomy," like gender itself, is manifestly a cultural construct. What is at issue is the poet's desire to erase the cultural imposition of sexual difference (and overt hierarchical opposition) through the subsumption of gendered anatomies within a dream of heterosexual symmetry.

43 Pinka, 70-71.

44 Pinka, 67, 70.


48 Holland, 125. Earlier in his article, Holland suggested that "the poem thus tries to master its opening aggressive and sexual coupling . . . by making it a meeting of souls" (123). Their is a certain element of truth in what Holland says which loses much of its validity because of the reductive nature of his analysis.
Even when Donne does focus on woman's bodily form, as, for example, in the notorious elegy *Going to Bed*, his most explicit wish is to induce the woman to mirror his own desires. His visual interest in her is merely a seductive pretext for other interests and pleasures—his desire to seduce her and his desire to gratify a male audience with the woman's appearance, a homosocial desire for recognition. His desire for power is related here, as it so often is, to a drive for disseminating symbolization.
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